Topoi. Orient-Occident. Supplément

Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean: one world, two seas, multiple routes?

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Mukherjee Rila. Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean: one world, two seas, multiple routes?. In: Topoi. Orient-Occident. Supplément 15, 2017. Méditerranée et Océan Indien. Deux mondes en miroir;

https://www.persee.fr/doc/topoi_1764-0733_2017_act_15_1_3016;

Fichier pdf généré le 26/03/2024

INDIAN OCEAN AND THE MEDITERRANEAN : ONE WORLD, TWO SEAS, MULTIPLE ROUTES ? [1]

It was not always sea routes that connected political units and merchant communities in the ancient world ; land routes provided essential linkages as well. The Silk Route was a Eurasian super highway in antiquity, Indian goods arriving at Babylon through the Persian Gulf and South Arabian ports, particularly Yemen, in a combination of land and sea routes as early as the seventh century BCE by way of Arab intermediaries [2]. The earliest evidence of commercial activity along the land routes comes from Sogdiana around the sixth century BCE and by the second century BCE Sogdian-dominated land routes extended to China [3].

A noteworthy phase of land-borne contacts between East and West is visible against the background of expansion by Achaemenid Persia in the fifth century BCE which linked Greece to Asia, at which point the exploits of Darius in 516-515 BCE connected northwest India to West Asia and the Persian Gulf [4]. The Arabian Sea and India became better known to the Mediterranean world from c. 515 BCE when Scylax explored the Indus and the sea route across the Indian Ocean to Egypt. But only the western Indian Ocean lands were thereby connected to the Persian seas, contacts with the central and eastern Indian oceans and their many seas, straits, bays and gulfs occurring somewhat later. Paradoxically, Persia also acted as barrier between the distant Indian Ocean lands and the Mediterranean

1. My thanks to Prof. Kenneth R. Hall, Ball State University, US, for overseeing various drafts of this paper and pointing out new directions of enquiry. Thanks are due also to Dr. J.-Fr. Salles, MOM, Lyon, France, for introducing me to new material and to Prof. Didier Marcotte of the University of Reims, France, PI of the project from which this paper results.

2. Eph'al 1982.

3. De La Vaissière 2002.

4. Salles 1998, p. 53-54.

worlds at this time, precluding thereby direct linkages between them[5]. But slowly the barrier moved eastwards, India thereafter becoming known to the eastern Mediterranean economies through indirect contacts along overland routes, the Scythian kingdom of Persia providing the initial links and the Kushanas thereafter facilitating connectivities between East and West in the post-Achaemenid period[6].

The Achaemenid expansion also enabled Phoenician Sidon, Berytos and Tyre to occupy strategic positions linking Indian Ocean lands with Mediterranean countries by way of the Persian Gulf and subsequently the Red Sea. This function continued into later periods and Roman Sidon, an important textile-producing centre, developed into an Indian Ocean port. The *Pharsale* of the first century CE noted that silk filaments from China (Seres) arrived at Sidon to be woven into purple-dyed fabrics before travelling into Egypt via the Nile[7]. There is ample evidence of Indian cotton yarn and Chinese silk filaments and woven silk reaching Roman Syria and a corresponding trade in western goods with China in this period[8]. Lucan's evocation of the Nile signals the new Chinese commercial link with Egypt:

> Yet shall I tell, so far as has the god, | Who veils thy fountain, given me to know, | Thy progress. Daring to upraise thy banks | Gainst fiery Cancer's heat, thou tak'st thy rise | Beneath the zenith: straight towards the north | And mid Bootes flowing; to the couch | Bending, or to the risings, of the sun | In sinuous bends alternate; just alike | To Araby's peoples and to Libyan sands. | By Seres first beheld, yet know they not | Whence art thou come; and with no native stream | Strik'st thou the Ethiop fields. (Translation Edward Ridley)[9]

The 'East' was an elastic concept, being consistently employed and systematically extended by early Western geographers to accommodate new information, arising from data in its turn derived from the tales of pilgrims,

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5. This barrier was surmounted when Alexander came to northwest India, but subsequent accounts of his voyages evoked the monstrosities of India, thereby not bringing to an end the production of fabulous imageries of the East. Jacob 1995, p.63, 74, 76.

6. Salles 2015; Jacob 1995; Chakravarti traces Kushana transformation from a nomadic to a sedentarized group: 'The sedentarization of the Kushana polity and the formation of the empire were not entirely rooted to agrarian experiences and resources as many ancient states did so – but was considerably oriented to the gains out of controlling vital trade routes in the vast territory', see Chakravarti 2014, p.60.

7. For Sidon's commercial role in the Greek, Persian and Egyptian worlds see Apicella 2003; for the Roman period, see Apicella 2004; Gratton 2007, p.161.

8. Stauffer 2007, see p.357-358, 364.

9. Lucan, *Phars*. X, 285-293.

mariners and merchants traveling to the East. Other than commercial links, religious associations and political ties, networks of prestige goods (diplomacy, tribute) and political-military complexes tied East and West and enabled the former to become progressively accessible. As did networks of information and knowledge, Dilley remarking that third century Manicheanism connected Europe and China in canonical developments similar and contemporaneous to movements in Greco-Roman traditions (including the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and the Syriac-speaking Christian philosopher Bardaisan of Edessa), in Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Confucianism [10]. As founder, Mani not only expressed general cultural developments, he also exemplified the mechanism of cultural and religious 'intercrossing' in Late Antique Eurasia. His engagement with diverse cultures and traditions was aided by the cultural contact zones of Iranian Mesopotamia, and his constant travels and attempts to win patronage among local rulers and even the Sasanian emperor provided numerous opportunities for exchange, even in a competitive, polemical context. Mani took part in a vast web of exchanges between members of court society, including both diplomatic officials and mobile religious experts, stretching from China to Rome, through Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and Iran, following trade routes and extending beyond them, and it is even likely he visited India in 240 CE [11]. Even without direct contact between distant regions, changes in one part of the Eurasian web could reverberate in other parts, with specific local ramifications [12].

This vision evokes the ancient Mediterranean-Indian Ocean contact zone as a gigantic web. Dilley, whose 'goal is to strike a balance between comparative and transfer studies, drawing on insights of the Histoire Croisée school, which addresses questions of transnationalism and transculturation by emphasizing the importance of both local developments and processes of exchange', suggests an approach based on the study of 'intercrossings,' that is, historical processes that affect various networked communities in different ways and at different tempos, rather than one of crossroads. This paper attempts a similar approach.

With respect to Late Antique canon formation, for example, 'it is impossible to determine if one tradition influenced another, and the local context is always crucial' [13]. Scholars emphasize the importance of Manichaeism and early Islam

10. For network models, see Chase-Dunn *et al*. 1998; Christopher Chase-Dunn and Andrew Jorgenson, 'Regions and Interaction Networks: a World-Systems Perspective'. Paper presented at 'Interactions: Regional Studies, Global Processes, and Historical Analysis', Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (February 28–March 3, 2001) http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/interactions/chasedunn.html accessed 8 Apr. 2009; Dilley 2013, p. 26.

11. Personal note, J.-Fr. Salles; Tardieu 1994.

12. Dilley 2013, p. 29.

13. Dilley 2013, p. 28-29.

to the development of the scriptural movement in the Late Antique Near East, as ultimately expressed in the idea of the 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitāb*), arguing for the major role played by this in the conceptual imaginary of the cultures of the Near East around the end of antiquity[14]. As a young man Mani encountered various Indian religions through the cities of Farat and Spasinou Charax, which were important maritime hubs for trade with western India. Travelling by boat from Farat to India early in his missionary journeys, Mani interacted with Buddhist and Jain sages, the second exchange explaining close similarities in doctrine and practice with Jainism. The appearance of a major Jain technical term, *kevalin*, or the 'perfect one,' in the unedited Manichaean writings of the Dublin Kephalaia codex from Egypt is a significant find, representing the first conclusive evidence for knowledge of Jainism in the ancient Mediterranean world[15].

Old Connectivities, New Interpretations

In light of new research, additional connectivities have appeared, persuading us to rethink Mediterranean-Indian Ocean contacts. Past research on the international trade of Asia in both antiquity and the classical period relied heavily upon Chinese, Perso-Arab and Western historical sources, all of which suggest economic interaction but in most cases only list geographical landmarks and ports and peoples encountered. Research based on such sources remains vague in its treatment of the multi-faceted dimensions of international trade and the non-economic links forged with local communities[16]. New archeological work definitively documents early trade between the Indus Valley settlements and Mesopotamian and early Greek societies[17]. By the fourth century BCE

14. Dilley 2013, p. 33.

15. Dilley 2013, p. 60.

16. Hall 2014a, p. 23.

17. New research on shells, stone beads and copper and bronze objects reveals regional and interregional interaction and exchange between the core area of the Indus Valley and surrounding regions, including Baluchistan, Rajasthan, Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Mediterranean. Current analysis of these objects suggests that between c. 3300-1700 BC Harappa was involved in multiple complex interaction networks with a variety of adjacent regions in order to obtain raw copper material. A combination of stylistic analysis, technological analysis utilizing scanning electron microscopy, and raw material sourcing reveals the presence of long distance exchange networks between South Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean over a long period. (University of Wisconsin-Madison research findings presented in the panel 'Indus Interaction Networks: New Research on Regional and Interregional Exchange' at the South Asia Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, October 2013). Information sent me by Ken Hall.

Aramaic inscriptions from the Middle East began to record an active maritime trade transporting goods from India's northwest coast to Seleucia in Mesopotamia via the Persian Gulf and the Tigris River[18]. As early as circa 116 BCE an Indian man, identity and occupation unknown, was present at Egypt; this Indian brought Eudoxus of Cyzicus to his country[19]. Barygaza in present-day Gujarat was an important junction in the East-West trade but it was also the terminus of the overland trade between China and India around the time the *PME* was compiled c. 50 CE[20]. Another important port on this coast involved in the East-West trade at this time was Barbaricon[21]. These two ports provided the essential links between the Indian Ocean and the eastern Mediterranean. The imperial capital of Ctesiphon in Iranian Mesopotamia of the third century CE, already referred to, was located on the crossroads of Late Antique Eurasia and signaled the centrality of the region in antiquity. Indian Ocean links were visible further south; the sixth-century Hellenised kingdom in the Horn of Africa located at Adulis, Eritrea, revealed ancient India-Greece-Africa commercial networks[22]. Once India became readily accessible to kingdoms of the West, it was only a matter of time before the latter became acquainted with still more eastern lands, such as China.

Within China too, westward contacts were gradually established. New research has appeared on Han and post-Han China relative to new contacts, especially in the Buddhist age that was previously negated by Chinese dynastic histories. Instead, the latest research focuses on the shift from the Yellow River basin into the Yangtzi basin in the post-Han era and reveals the emergence of a new society with ample contacts to the West, via Central Asia, that extended into the classical Western world. The post-Han literature that is being analyzed places India at the 'centre' of the ancient world, as the 'birthplace' of Buddhism[23].

By the third century CE Chinese interests penetrated into the Bengal littoral, the Southern Dynasty at Nanking claiming that since it had appointed Tamralipta's 'king', the latter owed allegiance to the Southern Dynasty[24]. Tamralipta was the chief port of the 'Tan-mei' kingdom in Bengal and its ruler, as vassal, apparently

18. Hall 2014a, p. 99.

19. Gryzbek 2002, p. 342; Poseidonius, ed. I.G. Kidd, vol. 2, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 14-1, Cambridge (1988).

20. Hall 2014a, p. 25-26, 29.

21. Ghosh 2014; Hall 2014a, p. 26.

22. Fauvelle-Aymar 2009.

23. Felt 2014.

24. Bhattacharyya 1998, see p. 163 and endnote 38.

sent letters to the Chinese court[25]. The precise dates of the embassy sent from Tamralipta to the southern Wu at Nanking are unknown, the embassy taking place sometime in the third century CE[26]. This was a period of intense Buddhist circulations, Ray remarking:

> … the period… includes some of the most troubled times when China was divided into as many as fourteen small states, like Wei (AD 220–265), Shu (221–263), Wu (222–280), Western Jin (265–317), Eastern Jin (317–420), Song (Liu-song, 420–479), Qi (479–502), Liang (502–557), Chen (557–589), Northern Wei (386–535), Eastern Wei (534–550), Northern Qi (550–577), Western Wei (535–556) and Northern Zhou (557–581), followed by unification by the Sui (581–618), followed by the golden period of the Tang Dynasty (618–907). It is remarkable that Buddhism started flourishing in China during this period of political flux, even though it is supposed to have been first introduced under the Han emperor, Ming Di (AD 58–75)[27].

The breakup of the Han was therefore a significant moment in facilitating China's contacts to the west. A newly-discovered India, with its long history and sophisticated civilization, forced a re-evaluation of Chinese ideas on the centrality of China in the world, as well as the bizarre and/or divine qualities of the edges of the earth. This provincializing of China is a manifestation of the powerful cultural Buddhacization of China taking place throughout this period[28]. In a perceptive article Yang Jupin traces the changing Chinese names for India in the Han and Later Han periods: Shendu, then Wuyishanli and finally Tianzhu: 'According to the *Houhanshu*, Tianzhu was a great country bordering the Yuezhi and Gaofu (高附) in the west, the sea to the south, and the country of Banqi'[29]. These were all names for various parts of India with which the Chinese were familiar, sometimes including southern Afghanistan and present Assam, and not to be confounded with the present territorial extent of India.

The repositioning toward the Yangtzi basin during the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin periods as well as the southward move of the capital from Luoyang to Jiankang (Nanjing) during the Jin also symbolized southern contacts by sea, visible in a discernible shift away from the Yellow Sea to the South China Sea, and resulting in the trade known as the Southern or Nanyang trade that peaked

25. Petech 1950, p.53.

26. Petech 1950, p.55.

27. Ray 2007, p.509.

28. Felt 2014.

29. Jupin 2013, p.85.

between the third and seventh centuries CE[30]. The eastern Mediterranean trade would subsequently feed into this trade.

The Western Seas and the Indian Ocean

Aegean Sea -Indian Ocean Links via Central Asia

Meanwhile, the Greeks from the eastern Mediterranean world took the initiative in approaching India; in 330 BCE Alexander conquered parts of northwestern India and around 300 BCE Seleucus Nicator, founder of the Seleucid Empire, followed Alexander into northwestern India[31]. Sources suggest that Alexander's vision was not merely political and terrestrial; it was economic and maritime as well. Apparently, at the time of his death Alexander was contemplating a follow-up of Nearchus' expedition by proceeding from the Euphrates to the Red Sea to divert the lucrative transit trade by sea between India and Egypt from the hands of (possibly) the Sabaeans or the Himyarites (not certain) to the Greeks, and there is also some debate as to whether Alexander came as far as the River Ganga (Ganges) in eastern India[32]. But Greeks were certainly present in the Maurya Empire (c. 322 BC–185 BC), and after its decline Bactrian Greeks conquered northwest India around 180 BCE and formed the Indo-Greek kingdom. Knowledge of the East gained a further momentum from this period.

By the middle of the second century CE, the eastern Mediterranean world's knowledge of the eastern Indian Ocean appears to have extended to the Gulf of Tongking, where Serica and Sinae, synonymous with interior and maritime China respectively are mentioned and Cattigara, an urban centre on the upper edge of the Red River delta, downstream from modern Hanoi, is referenced[33].

But while these initiatives made the Indian Ocean world 'known' to the Mediterranean world, the invasions seem to have also resulted in the destruction of the Buddhist canon in India and Central Asia:

> Whether Buddha's teachings were oral or written, there was a persistent belief in Buddhist texts that the dharma would disappear from the earth at some point in the future. According to some traditions, which echo Iranian accusations against Alexander the Great, this loss of the dharma is initiated by the invasion of a foreign king or kings, identified with various peoples, including the Greeks and the Parthians, no doubt reflecting historical incursions. In one version, the *Prophecy of*

30. Crespigny 1991a, p.9-13; Crespigny 1991b, p.161; Gungwu 1998.

31. Rapin 2005.

32. Arrian, *Indica*, XLIII; Tarn 1923.

33. Schoff 1917, p.244; Hall 2011, p.89-95; Taylor 1983. For alternate locations of Cattigara, see Sheldon 2010, p.55-56.

> *Kātyāyana*, probably edited under the Kushans in the third century CE, the enemy kings are Parthia, Rome, and Iran. Conversely, kings in India were credited with stabilizing the transmission of Buddhist scriptures, most famously Aśoka, the third-century BCE Mauryan ruler… [34]

Significantly connectivity, forged through the interrelated dynamics of religion, alphabet and itinerant experts in the various courts of the Central Asian kingdoms particularly those in the border areas between Rome and Persia, such as Armenia, eastern Iran and India, brought with it, paradoxically, a sense of loss in contemporary eyes.

There seems to have existed at this time in Eurasia a competitive multi-state system in complex interactions with local contexts of writing, in which official communications were made either in Greek; in Iranian languages, written in Aramaic characters; or in local Prakrit (Middle Indic languages), written in Brāhmī (Indic) or Kharoṣṭhī script, itself derived from Aramaic letters. In his description of the 'competitive multistate system' in Late Antique South Asia, Witzel categorizes the various scripts and religions associated with the courts of the Indo-Greek, Śaka, Śuṅga, Tamil, Kṣatrapa, Śātavāhana, and later Kuṣāna rulers, suggesting a connection between "royal politics and the use of religion, language, and scripts [35]". It is noteworthy that Asoka's edicts were written in Sanskrit, Greek and Aramaic. Buddhism at the Han capital, Luoyang, is first attested in the second century CE, during which extensive translation activities were carried out by Indian, Parthian, Sogdian, and Yuezhi monks, with lay Chinese assistance; and although most of these seem to be affiliated with merchant communities, basic knowledge of Buddhism at the court was also evident [36]. By the third century CE, a number of *sutras* from middle Indic and Iranian languages (specifically, Khotanese) had been translated into Chinese. Debates over script, with implications for the written canon, were being carried out in numerous principalities of Central Asia and northwestern India c. the sixth century CE. A Manichaean historical account preserved in Middle Persian describes Mani's encounter with one Gundesh at the court of an unnamed ruler in Central Asia/northwest India. The two argued over the earliest and best script, agreeing finally on Aramaic, Greek, and Indic [37]. The new evidence suggests that the Greeks were not the only ones to approach India from the West. Similar reconstructions of the Confucian canon were going on in Qin-Han China from the third century BCE to the second century CE. Cross-cultural exchange and transfers made for a vibrant intellectual world and this

34. Dilley 2013, p.52-53.

35. Witzel 2006, at p.469-475 in Dilley 2013, p.64.

36. Dilley 2013, p.68.

37. Dilley 2013, p.50.

robust world would slowly extend to the Mediterranean, influencing it as much as it was shaped by it.

In geographical thought and cartography, too, complementary developments were underway. Felt traces Chinese geographical thought from the imperial geographies of the Han, through a surge of production during the Eastern Jin (317–420), and into the development of the 'map classics' genre in the Sui and early Tang, which were the original inspiration for the local gazetteers that characterized geographic writing beginning in the Song and remained the dominant form of geographical writing throughout the late imperial period. Arguing that the new literary genre of geographic writing allowed literati to understand and express the profound geographic shifts in the socio-political structure of China during this period, Felt identifies three significant moments: 1) socio-political fragmentation away from the imperial center and toward more local and regional structures in the post-Han period, 2) a demographic shift southward into the Yangzi Basin resulting in an intimate engagement with new environments and topographies during the Eastern Jin, and 3) regular cultural and commercial exchange with the Indian subcontinent as a result of the entrenchment of Buddhism within the Chinese ecumene. Each of these socio-political shifts may be seen in the seven subgenres that made up the field of Chinese geographic writing: accounts of provincial units, foreign lands, urban spaces, mountains, rivers, travels, and comprehensive geographies. Within these subgenres, topics were explored in new ways: local customs (*fengsu*), supernatural occurrences, temples, remarkable products, tombs, history, and the relationship between humans and their natural environment[38]. Forests, mountains, clouds and waters became the categorical stuff of landscapes; landscape being neither a botanical nor a geological reality but an essential component of a thoroughly *humanized* world. Landscape thereby became political landscape, a recognized and bounded social entity composed of a lord and communal people and inseparable from relations of authority[39].

In traditional Chinese geography the 'centre' embodied the sacred values, beliefs and symbols through which the social order was conducted, and it was considered to be the focus of activities, events, authority and power, in which the elites, the foci of power and the decision makers in central fields and institutions, could be found. In addition, the centre was where the meaning of events was created, where collective boundaries were determined, and where the perceptions of who was considered 'us' and who was considered them' were shaped. The 'periphery', on the other hand, was seen to be passive and took no part in the creation or distribution of customs and conventions; the periphery received these constructs from the centre and acted accordingly[40]. This is the theory of territoriality, which

38. Felt 2014.

39. Matsuda 2004, p. 263.

40. Avraham *et al*. 2006, p. 72.

reveals that various forms of social power cannot exist without these territorial rules. Territorial and social rules are mutually constitutive, which is the concrete meaning of the term spatiality[41]. We will see however that throughout history this idealized Chinese worldview came under threat, as peripheries resisted Chinese overlordship, the Inner Asian nomads confronting the Chinese imperial-peripheral and/or the tributary models and fitting neither[42]. The new geography grappled with this dilemma. How then to depict the margins of empire?

A centre-periphery system is characterized by physical, social and psychological distance between the core and the margins, and as long as the structure of both the centre and the periphery does not change, this distance remains constant. It is in the centre's interest to maintain this relationship and the periphery's dependence, and due to the centre's power and influence over interactions within the public space, it can do this relatively easily. It is also important to note that the centre – periphery divide sometimes follows ethnic or territorial lines[43]. Again, I argue here that it was precisely because of the real and perceived distance between the centre and the imagined 'periphery' that Chinese geographical thought remained vague, and the dynastic histories only reinforced this ambiguity. We must therefore use the Chinese sources with caution[44]. Despite these caveats it is undeniable that geographical knowledge accelerated in the post-Han period in China.

The new spatial developments were mirrored in the Hellenic-Roman world. The geographies and natural histories of Strabo (from Pontus, Turkey, then under the Roman Empire, 7-23 CE), Pliny the Elder (Rome, 77-9 CE), Ptolemy (Alexandria, second century CE) and Arrian (from Nicomedia in Turkey, then under the Romans, first-second century CE) show changing spatial awareness and intellectual shifts from the time of Scylax of Caryanda (late sixth-early fifth century BCE), Hecataeus of Milet (fifth century BCE), Ctesias of Cnidus (also fifth-fourth century BCE), Herodotus (fifth century BCE), Nearchus (fourth century BCE), and finally Eratosthenes (Alexandria, third century BCE)[45].

Arab accounts differ from Chinese accounts in that they were heavily influenced by foreign accounts from the start. After the Arabs defeated the Byzantines and conquered the Sasanian Persian Empire in the seventh century,

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41. Sack 1993.

42. Di Cosmo 1994.

43. Avraham *et al*. 2006, p.72.

44. On the problems associated with Chinese sources, see Thierry 2005.

45. Salles 2015. For Strabo, see Koelsch 2004. Koelsch notes Strabo created 'a world mosaic of places', Koelsch 2001, p.269. In the words of Denis Cosgrove, 'Strabo's *Geography* outlines a global science, inventorying the human habitation, alteration, and exploitation of the earth', see Cosgrove 2001, p.47.

they embraced the preexisting systematic geographic concepts, methods, and basic information of the classical-era Greeks and Iranians. 'Abbasid geographers began by locating the Islamic world at the center of the known world, consistent with the basic framework of classical Greek and Persian geographic theories (and common practice elsewhere then as now) by putting their own lands at the center of their maps. Their geographers' and cartographers' detailed and more precise knowledge of the Indian Ocean and the inclusion of China, at the eastern edge of the known world illustrate this process of inclusion[46]. As far-off places became accessible distances telescoped, and the unknown became gradually familiar.

The Mediterranean and the Indian Seas: Connective Roles of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea

Despite intense cross-cultural encounters by land, East-West contacts and transfers through sea routes dominate our perception. Received historiography narrates that the initiative of 'discovering' the Indian Ocean lands passed to the Romans after the Greeks, and the customary view is of Indo-Roman trade being conducted solely through maritime routes. This view is no longer tenable in light of new discoveries.

What is also important to note is that the Roman agency ascribed to Indo-Mediterranean trade was not the only agency; the trade resulted from a shared initiative by Indians and Arabs, as also Nubian engagements in the southern Nile region, connective to the eastern African coastline in the region near the mouth of the Red Sea as the new revisionist literature on Rome-India contacts demonstrates[47]. From c. 30 BCE when the Romans began trading to India, the western Indian Ocean lands became more familiar to the Mediterranean world through the sea routes, the *PME* testifying to these early contacts already in place from the second and beginning of the first centuries BCE[48]. This trade took

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46. Park 2011, p.23.

47. Nubian speakers based in Kordofan assumed control over the ancient state tradition of the Sudanese Nile valley in about 300 CE and remained dominant there until the nineteenth century. For about a millennium (c. 400-c. 1400 CE) the Nubian state tradition adopted Christianity as its religion; luxury goods were imported from afar by the kings, the Old Nubian language was written for ecclesiastical purposes and reasons of state, and a tradition of figurative art in the eastern Christian idiom flourished. Populous urban capitals, sometimes fortified and always adorned with churches, palaces and open public plazas, flourished within each of the medieval kingdoms, and conspicuously at Old Dongola and Soba. From Spaulding 2011, p.160-161. See also, Beaujard 2012 for Afro-Asian trade in the Indian Ocean. For a multicultural trading environment in which Romans were only one of the players, see Fauconnier 2012.

48. For direct Egypt-India trade see Salles 1998, p.60; for a recent revision of the *PME*, see Arnaud 2012; De Romanis *et al*. 1997.

place through the Red Sea, underscoring the importance of the Red Sea region as connector and the Nubian-Indian engagements just mentioned. Two Indian delegations to Augustus Caesar visited Rome in 25 and 21 BCE, coinciding with the entry of Roman traders into the Indian markets and the circumvention of Middle Eastern sailors and other intermediaries who had monopolized the India traffic until then[49].

The Persian Gulf, which had supplied Mesopotamia with Indian commodities from the third to the first millennium BCE, seems to have played a marginal role for Roman navigators and merchants at this time, Salles noting that the author of *PME*, who knew well the Red Sea routes, had less precise information of the Gulf itineraries, implying that the Gulf routes to India were 'closed' to the Romans, including the Roman Greeks and Roman Egyptians, and were dominated instead by local traders and navigators: Indians, Iranians, Dilmunites, Gerrheans and Characenians, to name a few[50]. Latin sources of the second century CE called the Gulf area *fines Indiae*, while Syriac sources of the same period referred to the Gulf as an Indian Sea[51]. These coastal peoples controlled the Gulf route to India, leading us to reconsider the customary depiction of the Rome-India trade as the chief trade of the period.

Regional and trans-regional networks controlled by Gulf-based peoples reveal a segmented trade with an enormous complexity of human and technological resources, of which the Rome-India trade through the Red Sea was just one facet[52]. Salles therefore proposes a reconsideration of the two routes to the East: the first, the ancient Gulf route supplying Mesopotamia, and ultimately the Mediterranean, by a caravan route through Gaza or by way of the Euphrates from the third millennium BCE and the second, the new, more direct route that the Romans opened to the East through the Red Sea and southern Arabia. The two routes functioned in parallel, with the first route locked to the Romans. The Gulf route historically supplied the whole area with rare goods from the East, while the Red Sea route had initially a more limited, but ultimately more significant role, by provisioning the Egyptian, Greek and Roman markets through the Mediterranean[53]. To break the Gulf monopoly on the eastern trade the Romans forced the India trade merchants to patronize Rome's preferred ports, charging them a mere 3 per cent duty on imports as incentive against the 25 per cent charged

49. Hall 2014a, p. 29.

50. Salles 2012, p. 322-324.

51. Salles 1998, p. 67.

52. Hall 2014a, p. 22.

53. Salles 2012, p. 323.

to Arab seamen at Leuke Kome, a small-vessel port at the mouth of the Red Sea[54]. Subsequently, the Mediterranean became prominent in the trade with the East.

Indomediterranea

In late antiquity Roman trade with India linked the eastern Mediterranean and China through the Bay of Bengal, the role of Arikamedu on the southeastern coast of India in Roman trade being well known. What is only now coming to light are the roles of Arikamedu and other early Bay of Bengal ports-of-trade as transmitters between Rome and China through intermediary Southeast Asian ports. The shift privileges Mamallapuram, a contemporary of Arikamedu, and the upper Bay of Bengal ports as agents connected to the Gangetic heartland in contact with Oc-eo in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam[55].

Rome-India relations lasted as late as until 640 CE. By that time the two worlds knew enough about each other for philosophy, shipbuilding and ceramic styles, astronomy, astrology and magic, science and technology to travel between the two[56]. Buttressing her concept of 'Indomediterranea', Pollard writes of magic being an essential component of the East-West sea-borne exchange at this time. Apollonius of Tyana, the miracle worker with the most prominent ties to India and African Kush, who allegedly lived during the first century CE, the supposed height of the Roman trade deficit with India, and who was written about by Philostratus in the early third century CE, when Roman-Indian trade appears to have been in decline, travelled to two areas with which Rome had long-distance trade relations, Ethiopia and India, in order to seek wisdom. In both cases, Apollonius linked trade and the exchange of knowledge[57]. As trade between Rome and India shifted in Late Antiquity from its zenith in the first and second centuries CE, India became even more exoticized by the Romans. Spices originally put to culinary, religious, or medicinal use became associated with magic as real connections between Rome and their Indian point of origin faded[58].

Crossings and exchanges in 'Indomediterranea' paralleled earlier developments in terrestrial early 'Eurasia'. This communication underlines the importance of the Eurasian encounters, wherein the Mediterranean world often figured tangentially. Are these evidences of cultural crossings enough for us to label the Mediterranean lands and the Indian Ocean region 'twin' or at the very least 'mirrored' worlds? This communication focuses the question, by playing

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54. Hall 2014a, p.27.

55. Hall 2015; Hall 2014a, p.23-24.

56. Fitzpatrick 2011; Parker 2008.

57. Pollard 2013, p.13.

58. Pollard 2013, p.2.

with these two labels, through the double lens of connectivity/(dis)connectivity and encounter. It examines the advancement of geographical knowledge, the intensity of commerce and the impact of cultural imports from both ends, as far as the evidence allows us.

Hellenic-Roman-Chinese Circulations

Although situated at the two ends of Eurasia, direct Rome-China contacts were slower to develop, indirect connections through the overland routes being the norm until the first century CE. From antiquity the Asian silk roads had connected to the Black Sea via the steppe routes, while the oasis routes connected Asia to the eastern Mediterranean, and the sea route linked the Adriatic, the Mediterranean and the Black seas to the Indian Ocean[59]. In this communication the last two routes are discussed; nevertheless we should remember that the steppe routes had always provided the essential connectivities between China and the West, Waugh noting that Sogdian, and then Muslim merchants, carried on economic exchange between China and its steppe neighbors. As early as the fourth century BCE the Sogdian networks extended from their homeland in Transoxania into central China and in various directions south and west and well-defined Sogdiana-China networks are discernible from the second century. The Sogdians were caravan leaders and communicated in writing with their far-flung compatriots. Paintings in Sogdian Afrasiab (today, Samarkand) and Panjikent attest to international connections with, among others, China and the Turkic polities, which occupied the northern steppes in the sixth to eighth centuries CE. Embassies came and went, products were exchanged, and dancers and musicians travelled in an era when foreign exotica became the rage among the Tang elite[60]. There were marked Persian (Sasanian) influences in Sogdiana in terms of Persian brocades, Sasanian patterns and motifs[61]. Indian influence in Sogdiana and corresponding Sogdian influences on Indian art and textiles can be seen[62]. Central Asians journeyed within and beyond the Tang established Annam Protectorate, the region providing easy access to the southern seas. The Tangs sent a Sogdian, Samghavarma, who had already toured

59. Digital Silk Roads project at the Toyo Bunko in Japan, http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/imdsr/07DSR_E/dsrmap_e/, accessed on 5 January 2013.

60. Waugh 2013, http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/10.1/forum_waugh.html, accessed on 22 January 2014.

61. Compareti 2003; Gadjiev 2003; Kageyama 2003. Available at www.transoxiana.org, accessed on 15 September 2009 and 11 August 2010.

62. Grenet 2007; Yatsenko 2003; Compareti 2009, available at www.transoxiana.org, accessed on 15 September 2009 and 11 August 2010.

the pilgrim routes in India to make drugs in Annam[63]. By the seventh century therefore, uplands and seas seem intimately connected in East Asia.

If the Mediterranean world connected directly at all with Indian Ocean polities in antiquity, it was mostly through the oasis routes across Inner Asia, travelled for centuries by Chinese, Indian and Central Asian peoples where, as we read, the Buddhist clergy and laity played a significant role as cultural brokers. There are obscure references in Claudius Ptolemy, via Marinus of Tyre, to a Hellene called Maës Titianus who, either in the early second century CE, or at the end of the first century CE, went as far as either the Pamirs or Kashgar in what may have been one of the earliest attempts by the Romans to cut out the Parthian middlemen in the potentially profitable trade between China and Rome[64]. Alternative routes to the East had to be found, and here the Nabateans enter our story.

The Nabateans, southern neighbours of the Parthians, played a significant role in the trade in incense between East and West. Also dealing in spices, incense, gold, animals, iron, copper, sugar, medicines, ivory, perfumes and fabrics, the Nabateans were exceptionally skilled traders, facilitating a commercial network between China, India, Egypt, Syria, Greece and Rome. Their capital city was the legendary Petra, which, from its origins as a fortress city became a wealthy commercial crossroads between Arabian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures. Control of this crucial trade route between the upland areas of Jordan, the Red Sea, Damascus and southern Arabia was their lifeblood. In 106 CE, Trajan claimed the Nabatean kingdom and renamed it Arabia Petraea. As ally of the Roman Empire, the Nabataean kingdom continued to flourish until the second century CE. Its power extended far into Arabia along the Red Sea to Yemen, and Petra became a cosmopolitan marketplace linking the Red Sea-Persian Gulf area, as ceramics discovered there attest, though its overseas commerce was diminished by the rise of the new Eastern trade route through Myos Hormos and Coptos on the Nile[65]. According to Strabo, as many as 120 ships sailed from Myos Hormos to India c. 29-26 BCE[66]. Berenike was another western terminus of Roman ships, and from both Myos Hormos and Berenike an overland caravan network transported Indian goods to the Nile and then by boat to Alexandria[67].

While the *PME* mentioned a shadowy region called Thina in the extreme east of the Indian Ocean, it was only c. 100 CE-166 CE that direct Rome-China relations began, a group of magicians/jugglers in 121 CE arriving from

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63. Taylor 1983, p. 182.

64. C. Ptolemy, *Geography*, 1.11.7. See Stückelberger *et al*. 2006.

65. Schmid 2007, p. 67-70. For Berenike, Myos Hormos and Coptos, see Brun 2002; Sidebotham 2002.

66. Fauconnier 2012, p. 75. Strabo, *Geography*, II.5.12.

67. Hall 2014a, p. 27.

'the west of the sea' via Southeast Asia at the Chinese court[68] and a largely sea borne embassy of Marcus Aurelius arriving at the Chinese court in 166 CE[69]. One Chinese text relates how Roman, possibly Alexandrine, traders arrived at the Chinese court in 284 CE with scented agaru-wood paper from Southeast Asia, not the Mediterranean; this was a new medium that fascinated the emperor, who ordered commentaries on the Confucian classics to be written on them[70]. This indicates Roman familiarity with eastern Indian Ocean lands and, surprisingly, Chinese unawareness of local products in its immediate vicinity. What are we to make of this seeming ignorance?

While the Indo-Roman trade has received scholarly attention, including the amazing find of the possible depiction of Muziris on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*[71], much less notice has been paid to Chinese-Mediterranean contacts. This communication will concentrate on contacts between China and Rome by delineating the chief phases in communications between the two, using for convenience European templates of historical periodization. The eastern Indian Ocean is focal, especially the Bay of Bengal and the southern China seas connection to the Mediterranean. Since China-Persia-Rome-Byzantium-Arabian linkages via overland passageways are now (as summarized) better understood, the remainder of this study will reevaluate the documentation of the early eastern Indian Ocean sea routes, in characterizing them as a combination of networked land, sea, and riverine passageways travelled by diverse media of transport.

Egypt-Assyria-Babylonia-Rome-China: Contacts in Antiquity

Despite the known existence of the silk routes, connectivities and encounters in the early years between the extreme east of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean are hard to discern at first. Indirect contacts did occur, the Shang and Zhou (Chou) dynasties of the second and first millennium BCE valuing ivory –from the elephant or hippopotamus, it is not clear– concurrently with Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia and the old Aegean area, leading Bishop to write:

This parallelism, in fact, extends so far and in such detail, particularly in point of technique, that it is difficult not to feel that there must have been some

68. Pulleyblank 1999, see p.78, 75. See too Schoff 1917, p.242-243, where he opines that this refers to Indian jugglers, 'Ta-ts'in' or 'Da Qin' as being any country west of China, p.243.

69. Schoff 1917. The use of the sea route was obviously an attempt to avoid crossing Parthian territory, Schmid 2007, p.70.

70. McLaughlin 2010, p.139; Leslie *et al*. 1996, p.159-160.

71. In Fauconnier 2012, p.90-94. The eastern Mediterranean-Muziris trade reached its height in the first-second centuries CE.

interchange of ideas, in all probability along the line of the ancient trade route through Central Asia. For instance, in both regions ivory in early times was very extensively used as a decorative inlay on wood; and in both, as the supply became gradually less, the expedient was adopted of replacing it with mother-of-pearl. Ivory is mentioned in the Chou-li, or 'Ritual of the Chou Dynasty,' as one of the 'eight raw materials.' One of the principal uses to which it was put was the adornment of woodwork of various sorts, including chariots of state, which were decorated with a richness hardly equalled in the cars of the warriors of Pharaoh or the heroes of Homer. It was used too in the manufacture of weapons-for bow-tips, archers' thimbles, and sword hilts. It also appears in the form of various articles of dress and the toilet, such as amulets, combs, and hairpins; for the Chinese noble of that day wore his hair long and done up in a knot on the top of the head. In the form of a spike, used for untying knots (the ancient Chinese used no buttons in fastening their garments), it was worn suspended at the girdle, its assumption being one of the tokens of maturity. Ivory goblets are also mentioned; and the tyrant Chou Hsin, last ruler of the ancient Shang dynasty, is said to have been the first to employ ivory as the material for his chopsticks[72].

In the second century BCE the explorer and diplomat Chang K'ien/ Zhang Qian noted that Syria and Chaldea lay close to the Western Sea,[73] but it is not clear whether he meant the Mediterranean Sea, or the Persian Gulf or even the Red Sea. Yu notes that '"Western Sea" is not a specific term in Chinese historical works for a particular sea: it is also used of the Qing Sea, the Aral Sea, the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf in distinct cases'[74]. The western termini of the Silk Road were Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt; Antioch, the capital of the Syrian Kingdom and Alexandria, the capital of the Egyptian Kingdom being important mercantile, transportation and cultural hubs in the Mediterranean world of Chang K'ien's time[75]. Contacts occurred mainly through Antioch, capital of what was known to China as Ta-ts'in or Da Quin, which was the eastern Roman Empire or, more familiarly, the Roman Orient[76]. Antioch and Alexandria, in their turn, enjoyed vital linkages with two premier inland commercial centres, Petra in the Nabatean kingdom and Palmyra in Syria/Jordan. Persia was known to lie on Ta-ts'in's southeast and Parthia on its east. A 'water road' linked Ta-ts'in with China

72. Bishop 1921, p.296-297.

73. Hirth 1917, p.97.

74. Yu 2013, p.6.

75. Yu 2013, p.5.

76. Hirth 1885. Schoff however warns that 'Ta-Ts'in' could also simply mean lands west of China, Schoff 1917, p.243.

through Yungchang-fu and Bhamo in Yunnan (now a part of China) and northeast Burma respectively [77].

Rome-China: Connectivities in the Classical Period

Between the first and third centuries CE the Roman Empire was called Da Quin as noted, but 'as it is found to the west of the sea, it is also called the Kingdom of Haixi (Egypt)', a clear reference to post-Ptolemaic Egypt, when Augustus incorporated it into the Roman Empire [78]. 'Da Quin' is first mentioned in the 'Xiyu Zhuan' of the *Hou Hanshu* (ch. 88) and the 'Xirong Zhuan' of the *Weilüe* and may be identified, as we saw, with either the Roman Empire, or more specifically with Syria or Egypt [79]. Da Qin was the Roman Empire that, replacing the three Hellenic kingdoms –Egyptian, Syrian and Parthian Persia–, ruled the entire Mediterranean region [80]. Around 90 CE, when the Chinese established control over the Tarim basin, the silk route from north China to Rome needed to pass through only four polities: China, the Kushana kingdom, Parthia and the Roman Empire. The alternative route was through Petra, the Nabatean port, which became part of Roman territory c. 105-6 CE when it was incorporated into the empire as the short-lived Arabia Petraea [81]. Contacts between China and Rome just got easier, at least in theory.

The *Hou Hanshu* describes the silk route of the first century CE into the Roman Orient: it went to Antiocha Margiana, Ctesiphon, Hira and then passed through the Arabian Peninsula to the Arabian coast, and then onward to the silk-buying factories of the Phoenician coast: Tyre, Sidon, Berytos [82]. In 97 CE Kan-ying/Gan Ying was sent as ambassador to the Roman Orient, we learn that in Chaldea he came upon a great sea; he called it the Indian Ocean, but again, this was probably the Persian Gulf. He is likely to have travelled from the Tarim Basin via Hunza/Gilgit (the 'Hanging Passages') to Gandhara and then headed south, crossing the frontier of Parthian territory somewhere southwest of Uch near the Indus before heading mainly west via Kandahar and Herat, to Susa. From there, he would have then travelled *southwest* (as stated in the text) to the port

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77. The Digital Silk Roads project http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/imdsr/07DSR_E/dsrmap_e/, accessed on 5 January 2013, shows the land route into the eastern Mediterranean.

78. J.E. Hill, The Western Regions according to the *Hou Hanshu*. The *Xiyu juan*. "Chapter on the Western Regions" from *Hou Hanshu* 88, second edition (extensively revised and expanded) ©July 2003, section 11.

79. Yu 2013, p. 1, 5.

80. Yu 2013, p. 5.

81. Thorley 1971, see p. 73.

82. Hirth 1909, p. 46.

city of Spasinou Charax and the coast of the Persian Gulf[83]. On being told of the dangers, possibly exaggerated to discourage Kan-ying attending such a long sea-voyage to the eastern Roman Empire by Parthian sailors who guarded their knowledge of the monsoon winds facilitating West-East voyages by sea, Kan-ying abandoned his travels and returned home[84]. By the third century CE information about the route from Alexandria to Antioch reached China, the *Weilüe* mentioning that from Wu-ch'i-san (Alexandria) it took about a week to reach Antioch by the Mediterranean[85].

Chinese annals had long mentioned the lucrative trade India conducted with Ta-ts'in, at its chief port of Petra[86]. China too needed Roman gold and silver, as it historically lacked these two precious metals[87]. The two worlds of China and the Mediterranean could have connected through the land route but as An-hsi (Parthia) consistently blocked a direct Syria-China trade in order to retain its dominant position as intermediary, new routes had to be found for the Chinese to directly access western goods[88].

The Parthian Stations of the first century BCE had been a modification of the ancient trade route of the Medes and Assyrians; the rise of Persia diverting much traffic to this Royal Road controlled by Parthians. The route began at Antioch and crossed the Euphrates at Zeugma, the modern Birijik. This was on the high road to Edessa and Armenia. After crossing the Euphrates the Parthian route made a direct line, avoiding the long bend in the river, which it reached lower down and followed until Neapolis, where it left the Euphrates and crossed overland to Seleucia on the Tigris. Then it ascended the hills of Media, crossed the Caspian

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83. Hill, The Western Regions, Appendices.

84. Bangwei *et al*. 2011, p.92. Kan-ying was told: «The sea [Indian Ocean] is vast and great; with favorable winds it is possible to cross within three months – but if you meet slow winds, it may also take you two years. It is for this reason that those who go to sea take on board a supply of three years' provisions. There is something in the sea which is apt to make man home-sick, and several have thus lost their lives». When Kan-ying heard this, he stopped, *Hou-Han-Shu*, chs. 86, 88 (written 5th Century C.E.), for 25–220 C.E. East Asian History Sourcebook: *Chinese Accounts of Rome, Byzantium and the Middle East*, c. 91 B.C.E.-1643 C.E. http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/eastasia/eastasiasbook.asp; Thorley 1971, p.75; Hall 2014a, p.26.

85. Hirth 1909, p.46-47.

86. Hirth 1885, p.160-163.

87. Thorley 1971, p.76.

88. Hirth 1885, p.42, 45, 47, 70, 82, 173-174. While Hirth claims An-hsi is Parthia, Petech feels that An-hsi might also have been Persia. Also An-hsi may not have been Parthia proper but the Indo-Parthian kingdom of Gondophares, see Petech 1950, p.15, 70. Yu 2013, identifies Anxi (An-hsi) with Parthian Persia, p.5.

Gates, and followed the fertile valleys eastward through the modern Khorasan to the Herat River. Here, instead of proceeding eastward to Bactria and the Pamirs, the Parthian route turned southward to Lake Helmund and Kandahar, where the record ended. At Lake Helmund there were two routes: one northern, the other southern. Such trade as passed through Parthia and came directly under the control of the Parthian monarchy went over the route sketched by Isidore of Charax, ending at Antioch; and the Parthian route included the space between Kandahar and Lake Helmund, which had also to be traversed by those bound for the Persian Gulf. It is clear that the southern kingdoms tributary to the Parthian state were in large measure independent in their commercial affairs, and that some understanding to this effect existed with the Parthian capital; otherwise the diversion of trade between the northern and southern routes at Lake Helmund could not peacefully have occurred. A trade in Chinese silks along this route was carried on between the Pamirs and Spasinou Charax, whence the merchandise went by sailing vessels around Arabia, and finally reached the Levant through the mart of Petra[89].

If the route laid down in the *Parthian Stations* was the high-road of commerce under the Parthian Empire, it suggests not only a thorough regulation of commerce throughout its own dominions, but also a lack of trade control in other states generally counted as tributary to the Parthians, who controlled their own commercial affairs. The Scythians, Kushanas and Saka tribes were powerful intermediaries on this route. Isidore mentions two revolts against Phraates who, various Roman historians note, was expelled from the capital and forced to flee to the Scythians, by whom he was given aid, returned and reestablished himself on his throne. The unnamed Scythian king probably ruled over the Saka Scythians, who had been driven westward from Chinese territory by the Yueh-chi, who had set up in the former Greek kingdom of Bactria a powerful kingdom under the Kushana dynasty some fifty years before Isidore's time. The Saka tribes had migrated ahead of the Yueh-chi and had settled in the Helmund valley, acknowledging some sort of dependence upon the Parthian dynasty. The Indo-Parthians overran the Cambay district in modern Gujarat in the first century CE and a combination known in Indian records as Sakas, Yavanas and Pallavas, raided much farther south in the two centuries following.

A later variant of the Royal Roads, the Summer Scythian Highway of c. the first century CE running from China to Byzantium via Sogdiana and the Caucasus and complementing the spice route by sea from the Indian Ocean to Rome via the Mediterranean, was also controlled by the Parthian Empire[90]. For the Chinese the route to Ta-ts'in stopped at Merv or Antiocha Margiana in the Parthian Empire,

89. *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax; an account of the overland trade route between the Levant and India in the first century B.C.*; the Greek text, with a translation and commentary by Wilfred H. Schoff, Philadelphia (1914).

90. Christopoulos 2012, map III.2.

the Chinese not being allowed further west[91]. As assertive intermediaries in the East-West trade, the Parthians made handsome profits[92]. Not surprisingly, the Chinese bought back from Parthia their own silk, manufactured into fine gauzes in the Roman Empire, being unaware that their very own raw silk had produced these fine silk textiles, used as they were to their own heavy brocades woven in China[93]. This commerce gives us an idea of the lucrative transit trade the Parthians conducted as mediators in the commerce between Rome and China. Embassies between the Chinese and Parthian courts made contact on multiple occasions during the periods between 126 and 91 BCE, 59 BCE and 9 CE, 73 and 77 CE and 91 and 123 CE, signifying Chinese need to surmount the Parthian commercial barrier to the West.

But from the end of the second century CE the three great empires of Rome, Parthia and Han China began to experience difficulties and land routes were consequently disturbed. By 130 CE China began to lose its grip on Turkestan, which came again under Turkic rule. In 163 CE war began between Rome and the Parthian Empire and in the early third century both Han China and Parthia fell from power[94]. Silk did continue to pass along the overland silk routes but with more difficulty than when there was peace from Luoyang to Rome[95]. The sixth century CE *Christian Topography* by Cosmas Indicopleustes references silk from the farthest corner of the Indies[96]; this was obviously an acknowledgement of China, Cosmas noting that the overland route from the Mediterranean lands was shorter than the sea route[97]. However, a Chinese encyclopedia of the thirteenth century wrote that frontier Arabs and Khozar Turks constantly menaced Ta-ts'in in the seventh century[98]. Travel by the land route therefore always remained dangerous and uncertain, as it spanned various political divisions and warring polities. The uncertainties forced the Mediterranean and East Asian worlds to finally connect directly consequent to fluctuating circumstances from the time of the Tang and 'Abbasid dynasties at the bipolar ends of the eastern and western worlds, the sea route itself involving a combination of intermediary land, river and sea routes.

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91. Thorley 1971, p.75.

92. Thorley 1971, p.79.

93. Thorley 1971, p.77-78.

94. Thorley 1971, p.80.

95. Thorley 1971, p.80.

96. Indicopleustes 2010, p.47-48.

97. Indicopleustes 2010, p.48-49.

98. Hirth 1885, p.20, 83; also p.50, 74-75, 85.

China's desire to establish direct contact with the Roman Orient was motivated no doubt by the need to access Roman goods first hand, but this was, as noted above, usually frustrated by An-hsi which succeeded in retaining its locational advantage, an unbeaten strategy until 166 CE when a Ta-ts'in embassy dispatched by Marcus Aureliius came by sea via a stopover on the central Vietnam coastline [99]. But this mission does not seem to have been regularly followed by other Romans, although Schoff does mention an unknown sailor called by the Chinese 'Tsin-Lun the Roman', who came to Kattigara c. 226 CE and, being conducted to the Chinese court, gave an account of 'the lands to the west of the sea' [100]. Roman ships arriving in Guangzhou in 281 CE are mentioned in the *Yiwen leiju*, and another arrival is mentioned in 284 CE (the agaru-wood mission) in the *Jinshu* [101].

Byzantium-'Abbasid Caliphate-China : Communications in the Medieval Period

During late antiquity and the early medieval period the Mediterranean and Chinese worlds connected by sea routes by way of the Indian Ocean. Fu-Lin or Constantinople was first mentioned in fourth century Chinese accounts [102]. As it was re-inaugurated in 324 AD at ancient Byzantium as the new capital of the Roman Empire in the reign of Constantine the Great (r. 306-337), for whom it was renamed in 330, it seems that Chinese knowledge of the Mediterranean world increased substantially at this time. But it was also confused with Ta-ts'in, it being noted that "the country of Fu-lin [Byzantium], also called Ta-ts'in [Roman Syria], lies above the western sea [Indian Ocean]. In the southeast it borders on Po-si [Persia] [103]". The account continued :

The emperor Yang-ti of the Sui dynasty [604-617/618 C.E.] always wished to open intercourse with Fu-lin, but did not succeed. In the 17th year of the period Cheng-kuan [643 C.E.], the king of Fu-lin Po-to-li [Constans II Pogonatus, Emperor 641-668 C.E.] sent an embassy offering red glass, *lu-chin-ching* [green gold gems], and other articles. T'ai-tsung [the then ruling emperor] favored them with a message under his imperial seal… [104]

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99. Hirth 1885, p.42.

100. Schoff 1917, p.249.

101. Christopoulos 2012, p.47.

102. Christopoulos 2012, p.67.

103. *Chiu-t'ang-shu*, ch. 198 (written mid-10th Century CE), for 618-906 CE. East Asian History Sourcebook : *Chinese Accounts of Rome, Byzantium and the Middle East*, c. 91 B.C.E. - 1643 C.E. http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/eastasia/eastasiasbook.asp.

104. *Chiu-t'ang-shu*, ch. 198.

The best account of Fu-lin history can be found in the Tang dynasty annals, in which the Chinese referred to it also as Da Qin. The annals stated that:

The country of Fulin (拂菻) is also called Daqin and is situated on the west side of the Western Sea (Haixi–Egypt). It is located at forty thousand li (~16,000 km); in the north it is bordered by the territories of the Turkish Kesa (可薩). At the western side, near the sea, there is the (capital) city of Constantinople (Chisan 遲散). (Fulin) has a common border with Persia in the southeast. Its territory extends more than ten thousand li (~5000 km), and its armies recruit hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Every ten li (~5 km) there is a pavilion, and every three li (1.5 km) there is a military place. There are ten subordinate, little countries, and to go there, the road passes through the countries of Yisan (澤 散 Armenia; in Armenian Hayastan) and Lufen (驢分 the Kievan Rus; Lat. Ruthenia) [105].

By the Tang and Song eras Chinese accounts indicate increasing awareness between the eastern Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean worlds. The accounts noted that Fu-lin was situated above the western sea (Indian Ocean?), west of the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf and south of the Coral Sea (Black Sea?) [106]. This knowledge was due to missions, mostly from Fu-lin but some also from Ta-ts'in arriving in China in 361, 456, 465-67, 643, 667, 701, 711, 719, 742, 745, 1081, 1091 and 1289 CE [107]. The medieval Indian Ocean became a networked sea with regional entrepots as new powers emerged: the Khmers at Angkor (944), the Songs in China (960), the Fatimids in Egypt (969), the Cholas in peninsular India (985), the Ly in north Vietnam (1009), and the Burmese at Bagan (1044) [108].

Yet Chinese geographical knowledge of the extent of Fu-lin, Da Quin and Ta-ts'in continued to be confounded, suggesting that the Chinese were locating these polities on the basis of territory and spatial extent and not in terms of their lineage, actual history or the different religious traditions and practices that distinguished Syria, Rome and Byzantium. The zones of personal *experience*, of geographical *knowledge* through second-hand information, hearsay and rumor and zones of *theory* and *myth* depicting *terra incognita*, lands beyond even second-hand information, combined together to provide Chinese accounts of Mediterranean lands. The three zones of geographical knowledge were enclosed within dynamic and fluid boundaries. Being historically contingent, the zones expanded and

105. In Christopoulos 2012, p. 70-71.

106. *Hsin-t'ang-shu*, ch. 221 (written mid-11th Century CE), for 1060 CE; *Nestorian Stone Inscription*, cols. 12-13 (written 781 CE); *Sung-shih*, ch. 490 (written late 13th Century CE), for 960-1279 CE; *Wen-hsien-t'ung-k'ao*, ch. 330 (written late 13th Century CE). East Asian History Sourcebook: *Chinese Accounts of Rome, Byzantium and the Middle East*, c. 91 BCE.–1643 CE, http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/eastasia/eastasiasbook.asp.

107. Christopoulos 2012, p. 77-78.

108. Hall 2014a, p. 99.

contracted over time according to current information, political stability and long-distance trade networks, particularly visible in the elimination of Parthia as a barrier in the second century CE. The zones were related to but could be mapped directly onto a set spatial unit such as the local, regional, imperial, civilizational or global. Sometimes zone one was limited to local communities, and at other times it could extend across a multi-ethnic empire, depending on the person or peoples inhabiting the centre-point. The expansion of zone one opened up greater access for zone two, and the extension of zones one and two eventually eliminated zone three [109]. Palat notes for a later period that though the Chinese had detailed information about local conditions, they did not have the technological means to generate a cognitive picture of the spaces that different peoples occupied or to mobilize them on the basis of their social identities [110]. This actually remained a problem in Chinese geographical thought throughout, making it difficult to assess the mushrooming of twin worlds, if at all they emerged. The *Sung-shu* noted c. 500 CE: 'as regards the Roman Orient (Ta-ts'in) and India, far out on the Western Ocean, though the envoys of the two Han dynasties have experienced the special difficulties of this route, yet trade has been carried on, and goods have been sent out to the foreign tribes, the force of the wind driving them far across the waves of the sea…All the precious things of land and sea come from there …all this has caused navigation and trade to be extended to those parts', suggesting that Chinese knowledge of the routes was still then vague and the trade was substantially transacted by intermediary multi-ethnic (rather than China-resident) maritime diaspora [111]. This is reinforced by Kia Tan's roundabout itinerary from Canton to the Persian Gulf, composed between 785 and 805 CE, which also was derived from second hand sources and betrayed no knowledge of the direct route between the Indian coast and the Persian Gulf, then dominated by Indian, Arab and Persian shipping [112]. However, potentialities for commerce remained a motivating factor in identification and mapping, as the Chinese were still eager to open trade relations with the Latin West and the Greek East. *Figure 1* shows the overlapping sectors of the medieval world.

The intensive Tang (618–907 CE) promotion of the maritime silk route, since transporting volumes of ceramics overland via the Central Asia passage on camels was not suitable to their trade in ceramics, changed Chinese geographic conceptions and perceptions of the countries of the West. The earliest extant document that describes the maritime route between Guangzhou and the Persian Gulf into Baghdad and the western shores of Africa is 'The Route to the Foreign

109. Felt 2014.

110. Palat 2013, p.230-231.

111. *Sung-shu*, ch. 97, in Hirth *et al*. 1965, p.7.

112. Hirth *et al*. 1965, p.9-10.

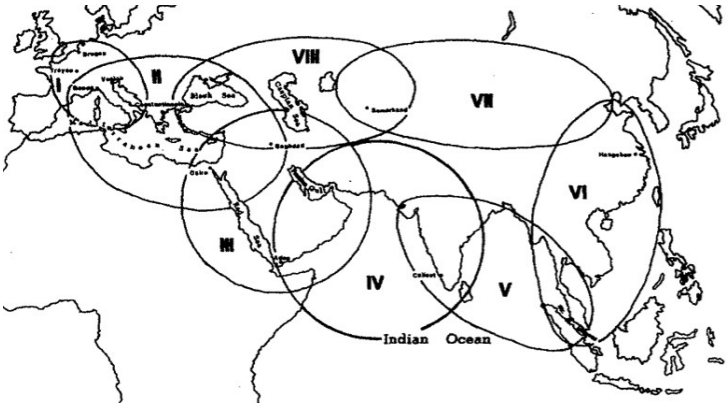

Fig. 1 – From ABU-LUGHOD 1987, p. 8.

Countries from Guangzhou' (Guangzhou tong haiyi dao), compiled around 800 during the Tang Dynasty. It was included in the geography section of the *New History of the Tang Dynasty*. Its author, Jia Dan (729-805), was prime minister and a renowned geographer who extended knowledge of routes to peninsular South Asia, already known during the Han period, to Daibul on the northwest India coast and beyond to Tilaluhuha, identified with Dierrarah, in the vicinity of modern-day Abadan in the Persian Gulf, the then entry point to the heartland of the 'Abbasid realm. As Minister of State Ceremonies, Jia Dan collected information in order to write geographic works about various regions[113]. Coincidentally, al-Mansur, the second 'Abbasid caliph, boasted soon after moving the capital from land-based Damascus to river-rimmed Baghdad in 762: 'This is the Tigris; there is no obstacle between us and China; everything on the sea can come to us on it.'[114] Subsequently, Ibn Khurdadhbih's (d. 912) *The Book of Routes and Realms* (*Kitab al- Masalik wa-al-mamalik*) and the anonymous *The Accounts of China and India* (*Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind*) confirmed Jia Dan's new route from Basra/Siraf to Khanfu (Canton, present-day Guangzhou). The fact that the information about the routes in these earliest accounts of both societies is mutually confirming suggests the accuracy of their textual information relative to that era. Archeological remains along the route from Guangzhou via the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf further substantiate the role of specified port cities as trans-shipment centres in this eighth-century maritime trade between China and the Islamic West world[115]. The route's popularity can be seen in the enormous amount of ceramics transferred to the 'Abbasid world, of which the treasures of the Belitung wreck are just one example (see *Fig. 2*).

Hall notes that:

> The enthusiasm of the 'Abbasid court for Chinese fine ceramics is well-documented from the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (766-809) onwards. Tang Chinese ceramics changed the food culture of the 'Abbasid court and wider society,

113. PARK 2011, p. 24-25.

114. PARK 2011, p. 25-26.

115. PARK 2011, p. 27.

necessitating their use of ceramic dishes, bowls, and ewers alongside their previous metal wares. This transition in the court's food culture was widely replicated in the wider society of the 'Abbasid empire, with a range of consequences. From the ninth century the most immediate impact was significant popular demand for Chinese ceramics at the 'Abbasid courts and among wider elite circles of empire. This expansive western Indian Ocean market necessitated increased levels of production in Chinese kilns, especially those of the Changsha group in southern China, which specialized in export ceramics. In turn, consumer demand in the 'Abbasid realm affected the manufacture of local Islamic earthenwares, prompting technical experimentations. In turn these led to higher aesthetic and production levels and enabled Middle Eastern producers to penetrate wider circles of Middle Eastern consumers well beyond the court. Ceramics scholars propose that during this period there were reciprocal aesthetic and technical influences of 'Abbasid ceramics on Chinese ceramic production, particularly in the development of under-glazed blue painting on white ceramics, as these were foundational to subsequent Chinese blue-and-white ware porcelain [116].

Hall adds,

the most significant evidence of 9th-century Indian Ocean realm societal transition is linked to new technological refinements in late Tang China's ceramic industry in late Tang China and the 'Abbasid glass industry in the Middle East…At the western end of this trading network, changes also took place on an industrial scale in 'Abbasid glass and ceramic manufacture, which were at least partly stimulated by their encounters with Chinese ceramics. In the glass industry, a fundamental shift occurred in production technology which, in turn, widely nurtured improvements in the quality, volume and diversity of glass production in the 'Abbasid empire. Archaeological excavations at glass-making furnaces in Syria, Iraq and Iran, and contemporary shipwreck cargoes in the eastern Mediterranean and Java Sea, and at coastal and hinterland sites in Southeast and East Asia, reveal significant increases in the volume and value of Arab glass being traded in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the whole length of the Indian Ocean routes. Islamic earthenware production was another creative response to local encounters with high-fired Chinese ceramics – often at the same sites as glass-making. The dialogue thus unleashed between the ceramics and glass industries from the two extremities of the Indian Ocean world stimulated further innovations in both [117].

Zhao Rugua, author of *Description of the Foreign Lands* (*Zhufan zhi*, 1225), says in his preface he was prompted to compile his own geographic account, important evidence that many maps with information about foreign countries circulated in the thirteenth century, such as Zhou Qufei's *Notes from the Land*

116. Hall 2014b, p. 3.

117. Hall 2014b, p. 3-4.

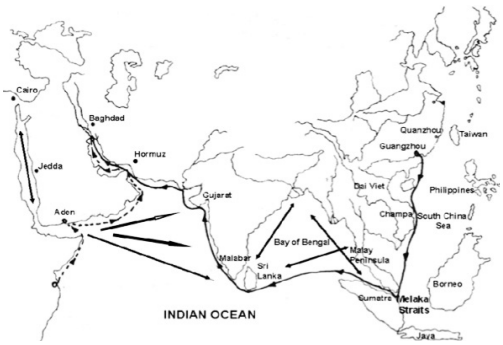

Fig. 2 – Middle East to China "Maritime Silk Road," c. 800-1500 from HALL 2014b.

beyond the Passes (*Lingwai daida*) of 1178. These maps suggest a networked Indian Ocean commercial realm already in *situ* stretching from China to the Islamic West in the Song era[118]. Chinese sojourning communities in Sriwijaya, and in South Asia somewhat later, rather than Muslim sailors connected this East-West trade, Arab merchants mostly deserting Guangzhou in AD 878 after the massacre of foreign merchants and shifting to Kalah-Bar or Kedah in Sumatra instead.

Yet, I am not sure how far these 'intercrossings' helped generate twinned worlds, Chinese geographical knowledge still remaining vague. As late as the late thirteenth century it was written that "the country of Ta-ts'in [Roman Syria], also called Li-kan [Syria], is the general meeting-ground for the nations of the western heaven, and the place where the foreign merchants of Ta-shih [the Arabs of the Caliphate] assemble. Their king is styled *Mie-lu-ku*. He rules at the city of An-tu [Antioch]. He wears a turban of silk with gold-embroidered characters, and the throne he sits upon is covered with a silken rug[119]". While Li-kan, as Syria, is mentioned in the *Chu-fan-chi*, Fu-lin too is identified with Syria, although by that time the Roman Orient had ceased to exist in all but name.

Perceptions in the Ilkahnid domains at this time offer us a clue to the continuing Chinese fascination with Byzantium[120]. In medieval Eurasia and lands further east, while both Rome and Constantinople were regarded as centres of Christian authority, Constantinople enjoyed a higher status in diplomatic circles and Rome or the Latin West was seen as peripheral. The Ilkhans recognized Byzantine emperors as heirs to the Kingdom of Alexandria, Greek learning, and the Ancient Roman Empire all of which the Ilkhanid court intellectual circles held in high regard. Byzantium represented a political centre in the Mediterranean world that remained a reference point for inter-state diplomacy even when the Byzantine Empire was in reality in decline. Constantinople held its status in Eurasia as the highest seat of Christianity and as such retained the privilege of distributing thrones and crowns within Christian lands. The Ilkhans sought to maintain good relations with Constantinople, and marriage diplomacy was their *modus operandi*.

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118. PARK 2011, p. 29-31.

119. C. JU-KUA, *Chu-fan-chi*. East Asian History Sourcebook: *Chinese Accounts of Rome, Byzantium and the Middle East*, c. 91 BCE.–1643 CE http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/eastasia/eastasiasbook.asp.

120. PRAZNIAK 2013, p. 184-185.

Diplomatic marriages between the Ilkhans and the daughters of the Byzantine rulers strengthened defense on the Ilkhanate's northern border where conflict with the Golden Horde created ongoing tension. One such bride known as 'Maria of the Mongols', Prazniak notes, played an intriguing role as a woman among a strong contingent of Mongol women at court and an Eastern Orthodox Christian among Buddhists, Nestorians, and Muslims.

From the 1280s, under Khubilai Khan, Jamal al-Din compiled a world geographic account using Muslim maps to depict distant places. *The Map of Integrated Regions and Terrains and of Historical Countries and Capitals* (*Honil gangli yeokdae gukdo jido*), short name *Gangnido* (*Kangnido*) drawn in Korea in 1402, which survives in a copy dated 1470, was based on Mongol-era maps. Examining the cartographic contours, we see that this map precisely shows, for the first time, the areas of West Asia as well as Europe and Africa; although not drawn to scale. The newly discovered *Map of the World Regions* (*Guanglun jiangli tu*), identified as a copy of the lost *The Map of Integrated Regions and Terrains* (*Hunyi jiangli tu*) by the Zen monk Qingjun hi (1328-1392) and a possible source for the 1402 map, draws several lines in the sea that look like sea routes. It follows Chinese tradition in that it is a map of China, not the world. But contrary to Song period maps, which reflected limited Chinese knowledge on geography, it incorporates new knowledge on Mongolia and Southeast Asia, with detailed information on sea routes, notably in concise long-distance navigation guidance in blocks near the most important coastal ports. A block near Guangzhou, along with a line that extends towards the west says, 'Riding the wind from Quanzhou, one can reach Java in sixty days, Malabar in 128 days, and Hormuz in around 200 days.' This block of text describing navigation testifies to the maritime route that connected the two port cities in China with the Persian Gulf under the Ilkhanate[121]. Wang Dayuan's *Shortened Account of the Non-Chinese Island Peoples* (1330s) contained much original information on the eastern Indian Ocean countries, but his accounts of the Middle East and North Africa remained vague at best; obviously he did not make the westward voyage[122]. Nevertheless these accounts reveal Chinese perception of mobility in the contemporaneous Indian Ocean world.

Chaudhuri and Abu-Lughod divided the Indian Ocean of that time into three circuits of trade and civilization centered on the Arabian Seas, the Bay of Bengal and the Chinese-Indonesian archipelago (*Fig. 3*)[123]. It was the first circuit that connected the Mediterranean world with the Indian Ocean mainly through the Red Sea, but also through the Persian Gulf. But if we carefully study *Figure 2* we see that the first circuit connected seamlessly with the other two circuits.

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121. Park 2011, p. 36.

122. Park 2011, p. 37.

123. Chaudhuri 1985; Abu-Lughod 1989.

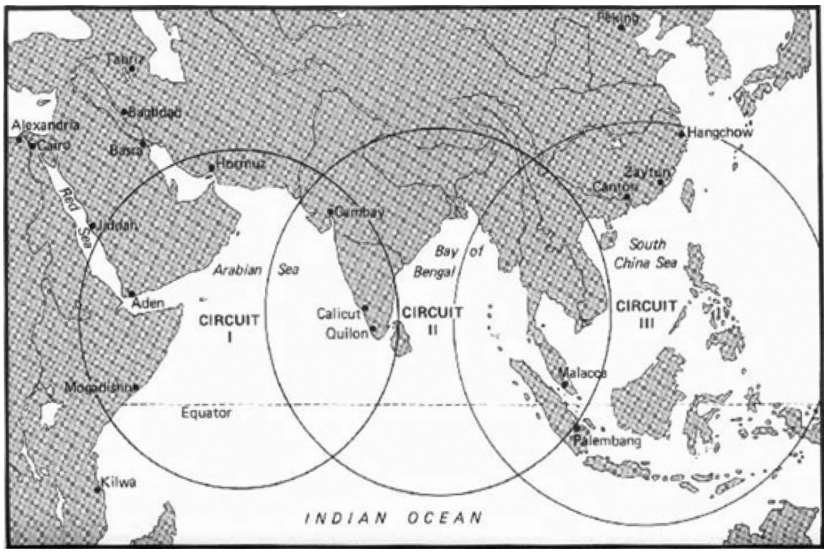

Fig. 3 – From ABU-LUGHOD 1989, p.252.

The circuits depicted by Chaudhuri and Abu-Lughod may be further broken up, as *Figures 4* to *6* from Hall demonstrate, giving us an idea of the variegated world the Mediterranean missions encountered once they arrived at Indian Ocean ports. While this eastern Indian Ocean world was no less integrated than the western Indian Ocean model by the medieval period, a meticulous reading suggests that being geographically and politically more fragmented in both the maritime and terrestrial spheres, it was somewhat slower to amalgamate than the western Indian Ocean world. Hall argues that the Bay of Bengal, despite showing a prior unity between 1000 and 1200 CE, became a fragmented polycentric world once again between 1300 and 1500 CE, neither its trading networks nor its regional trade approximating the inclusive Mediterranean world of Braudel [124]. *Figure 7*, showing trends between 1300 and 1400, clearly demonstrates the slower integration.

However, not just by sea, we also have references to western missions coming into Song China by the overland route in the eleventh century. While between 966 and 989 CE two missions from the Arabs and a mission in 975 CE from the Caliph of Baghdad arrived in China by unspecified routes [125], in 1023 CE a mission came from the Ta-shih, possibly referring to Persians and not Arabs which was the usual norm, but they were told to use the sea route through Quangzhou as port-of-entry subsequently. This may have been due to a fear of the Xi Xia, through whose territory the mission passed, capturing the Persian trade. What seems more likely is that the fragmentation of Persia into warring principates in the post-Sasanid period and the resulting factional struggles between the Samanids, Karkhanids,

124. HALL 2014a, p.217. I suggest the northern Bay of Bengal fragmented earlier. See "Introduction" in MUKHERJEE 2011, p.1-60.

125. HARTWELL 1983, Table 34, p.195.

Fig. 4 – From HALL 2004, p. 219.

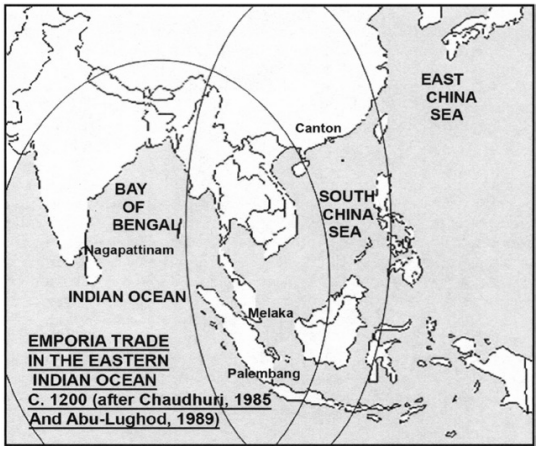

Fig. 5 – From HALL 2013, p. 74.

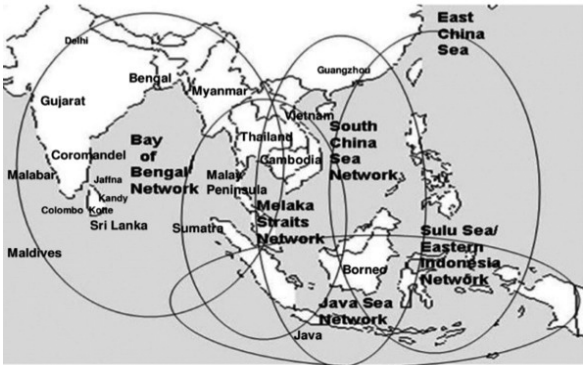

Fig. 6 – From HALL 2010, p. 111.

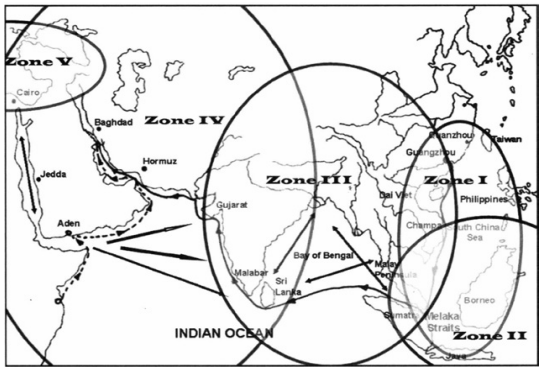

Fig. 7 – From HALL 2013, p. 77.

Ziyarids and Ghaznavids for power over Khorasan (the old Parthia) and control over trade routes in Transoxiana shattered Chinese notions of the old unitary Persia with whom it had initially conducted trade. The Chinese preferred to retain traditional conventions whereby intercourse with Persia historically occurred through land routes, Persia being always regarded as a land-based power. The new 'Persians' were therefore asked to come in by sea. But this advisory was not always followed. There arrived in 1096 CE another mission from Persia, possibly using the Khotan route; it seems likely therefore that this mission too came in by the land route through Inner Asia[126].

But Arab traders from the Umayyad, 'Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates, were not regarded as traditional land based Central Asian powers, although the 'Abbasids had advanced into Inner Asia and displaced China and its Turkic allies from Chinese Turkestan through the Battle of the Talas river in 751 CE[127]. These

126. HARTWELL 1983, Table 14, p. 71.

127. This was a definitive conflict between the 'Abbasid Caliphate and the Tang Dynasty, then under Emperor Xuanzong, together with various other peoples and nations associated with the geographical territory involved, for control not only of the Syr

traders used the sea route. Between 976 and 1116 CE there were around 27 tribute missions to China linking the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean worlds [128]. Other than these Ta-shih missions, Muscat sent two missions to Song China in 1011 and 1072 CE, Bahrain one in 1074 and the Hadramaut a mission in 1088 [129]. The Persian Gulf and Arabian seas were therefore once again connectors to the Mediterranean world in the early medieval period.

South Mediterranean-China : Contacts in the Late Medieval-Early Modern Periods

In Yuan China European contacts occurred mainly through the land routes spanning polities that had been 'pacified' during the 'Mongol moment'. Significantly, Mongol-Mediterranean contacts at this time broke from the immediately earlier Chinese tradition, being less commercial and more diplomatic and religious in nature, thereby reflecting the anxieties of the medieval Mediterranean world and its desire to find allies against the Muslims, as the search in Inner Asia for the kingdom of Prester John indicates [130]. The names of Plan de Carpini, William of Rubrouck, Odoric of Pordenone, of the Polos, of Pegolotti and of Marignolli are now well known in the history of contacts between medieval Europe and China,

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Darya region but also for a strategic area of Central Asia. The Battle of Talas had far reaching consequences ; it marked the end of the Tang Dynasty's western expansion of their territory, this representing the furthest point of territorial expansion to the west by the Tang, or any prior or subsequent Chinese dynasties. Leading up to this battlefield showdown, the Tang army had proceeded further and further westward, in a series of military events during the course of which various cities and states were conquered or overthrown. Meanwhile, a new power had arisen in the region. Beginning with a revolt against the Umayyad Caliphate, largely centered in Khurasan, not too far from Talas, the rising 'Abbasid Caliphate decisively defeated the rival Umayyad Caliphate, at the Battle of the Zab, in 750, which thus freed up their armies for other purposes, one of which would be to challenge the Tang expansion into the region. Both Tang and 'Abbasid troops met in the valley of the Talas River in July 751, where the Tang forces were defeated. The Battle of Talas is important because of the resulting changes in the political fortunes of the rival sides and in the region generally, not to mention the economic importance of control over this strategic region along the Silk Road. Henceforth the 'Abbasids would largely mediate contacts between China and the Mediterranean.

128. Hartwell 1983, Table 34, p. 196-202.

129. Hartwell 1983, Table 35, p. 206 ; Table 37, p. 208 ; Table 36, p. 207.

130. « L'Occident médiéval et l'Océan Indien : un horizon onirique », in Le Goff 1977, p. 280-298 ; De Rachewiltz 1996.

most having been sent on papal missions to the Yuan court, usually traveling through Inner Asia except for the last who came to China by the sea route [131].

The last of the medieval travellers to China, again traveling by a mix of land and sea routes, was a southern Mediterranean man from Morocco. This was Ibn Battuta who found an Islamic mirror as he met his counterparts over the course of his travels in fourteenth-century China: he sailed on a Chinese junk piloted by a Muslim and once reaching China he met the *kazis* of the Muslims and the *shaikhs* of Islam at Zaytun and again at Kanjan-fu [132]. We have to remember that Ibn Battuta was traveling in late Yuan China, which had retained substantial Islamic links. Battuta was clearly comfortable with the Islamic networks to be found in this foreign land, noting that in nearly every city in China there was a *kazi* and a *shaikh* to administer to Muslims [133]. At Khansa he stayed at the house of the famous merchant Othman the Egyptian, benefactor of the convent al-Othmaniyah and the Jama Masjid there [134].

Indeed during the Mongol period land borne contacts between east and west possibly dominated over sea borne routes and corresponding contacts. As noted earlier, this was made possible by the Mongol pacification of Eurasia, nodes along the oasis routes once again becoming significant transmitters of ideas between East and West. Fourteenth century Tabriz is a case in point. Prazniak notes that its claims to world historical status between 1256 and 1335 rested on three main categories of activity: commerce, scholarship and diplomacy. The geographic reach of this exchange took in Dadu, capital of the Yuan Dynasty in China, Kashmir, Siena, Constantinople, Cairo and Rome [135]. Vesconte's 1321 map of Persia, created for the Papacy in Rome, was part of a Papal project to emphasize Central Asian trade routes as an alternative to the sea-borne routes to Mamluk Egypt to acquire goods imported from South and East Asia. Having repeatedly restricted trade with the Mamluks, the Papacy in 1323 finally banned all trade with Alexandria and promoted both trade and missionary work in the Ilkhanate [136]. In 1273 a new mint master arrived in Tabriz from Georgia who set in motion far reaching fiscal reforms to create a coinage system for Tabriz that by extension would transform exchange across the Ilkhanate. Beyond standardizing silver coins by weight, design, and quality, coins were minted in copper and gold to cover all media of market exchange from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and

131. Yule 1866, see vol. 2.

132. Yule 1866, vol. 2, p. 487, 493.

133. Yule 1866, vol. 2, p. 489.

134. Yule 1866, vol. 2, p. 497.

135. Prazniak 2013, p. 170.

136. Prazniak 2013, p. 176.

South China coast [137]. The transit trade between India and the West being the most important single category of trade in the Ilkhanate, the India trade of the Latin West was responsible for Tabriz' prosperity [138]. Tabriz became a world-city and was praised as such by contemporaries Rashid al-Din Hamadani and Mustawfi of Qazwin. Rashid al-din wrote a world history c. 1304, which included consideration of India, China, and the Turkic and Mongol empires, as well as Byzantine and Latin Christendom, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity [139].

A new and more attentive awareness of Buddhism in central and western Eurasia was one of the primary cultural consequences of Ilkhanid rule in Tabriz. Roger Bacon and Marco Polo were interested in the precepts of Buddhism for its philosophical and political connotations, while the interest of other Europeans stemmed from potential conversion to Christianity. An extant copy of the *Lotus Sutra* dated 1346 with gold frontispiece illustrating the life of the Buddha found its way to a shelf in the Vatican Library, underscoring the many levels and directions of cultural exchange that circulated through and around Tabriz [140]. More instances of European art and cartographic styles influenced by cultural transfers may be found in the *Catalan Atlas*, which depicted the kingdom of Prester John in Central Asia or in the case of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, a Sienese artist, who created his fresco *The Martyrdom of the Franciscans* in 1342. Lorenzetti chose as his setting a contemporary Central Asian Mongol court, and he illustrated a remarkably detailed awareness of the cosmopolitan make-up of that world. Lorenzetti's *Martyrdom* scene reflects the 'whole cloth' vision of a global project similar to that projected in the illustrated texts of Tabriz [141]. Yet more cases are found. When the Ilkhanate began to experience a major fiscal crisis, the Mongol Bolad, straddling both the Yuan and Ilkhanid courts, introduced the use of paper money into Iran, based on then Chinese economic practices, but without success [142].

By the time of the Ming embassies between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean lands, whether by land or sea, lessened, despite the much-vaunted voyages of Zheng He in the Indian Ocean. The Persian Gulf and Red Sea links between the

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137. Prazniak 2013, p.174.

138. Prazniak 2013, p.176, quoting Martinez 2008-2009, p.152, 164. See Prazniak 2013, p.177-178 for the India trade.

139. *Jāme' Al-Tawārik̲* (The Compendium of Chronicles), the historical work composed in the period 1300-1310 by K̲ʷāja Rašid-al-Din Faẓl-Allāh Ṭabib Hamadāni, vizier to the Mongol Il-khans Ḡāzān (r. 1295-1304) and Öljeitü (r. 1304-1316). See Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tawarikh*: *Compendium of Chronicles*, éd. W.M. Thackston, Cambridge (1999).

140. Prazniak 2013, p.180.

141. Prazniak 2013, p.181 ; Prazniak 2010.

142. Prazniak 2013, p.182.

two worlds of East and West functioned only marginally, as the dwindling number of Western missions to China indicate. For the fifteenth century there are only fifteen entries in the *MSL* dating between 1412 and 1442 for Hurmuz and only two references to a mission from Baghdad to the Ming court in 1426, one dated 11 August and the other 22 August [143]. The Mings concentrated on the Indian Ocean as a whole; Zheng He leaving inscriptions at a Buddhist shrine in Chinese, at a Muslim shrine in Persian and at a Hindu temple in Tamil, all at Sri Lanka [144].

Wade comments:

> while the Yong-le emperor sought to dominate in the early part of the 15th Century through the sending of heavily-armed gun-boat missions to encourage the offering of "tribute" to the Ming by foreign polities, the situation had greatly changed by the 1440s. Even a formal request by the ruler of Hormuz that a Chinese envoy be sent there inspired no response from the Ming court. By the end of the 15th century, the importance of the relations with foreign lands had declined to the degree where provincial administrations were dealing directly with the rulers of countries abroad [145].

Nevertheless the two World Maps drawn by Fra Mauro in Venice in 1450 and 1459 show a changing awareness of the Indian Ocean world (see *Fig. 8*). Fra Mauro wrote in his map:

> Around 1420 a ship, or junk, from India crossed the Sea of India towards the Island of Men and the Island of Women, off Cape Diab, between the Green Islands and the shadows. It sailed for 40 days in a south-westerly direction without ever finding anything other than wind and water. According to these people themselves, the ship went some 2,000 miles ahead until – once favourable conditions came to an end – it turned round and sailed back to Cape Diab in 70 days'…The ships called junks (lit. "Zonchi") that navigate these seas carry four masts or more, some of which can be raised or lowered, and have 40 to 60 cabins for the merchants and only one tiller. They can navigate without a compass, because they have an astrologer, who stands on the side and, with an astrolabe in hand, gives orders to the navigator' (Text from the Fra Mauro map) [146].

Jesuits such as Ricci, Ruggieri and Kircher became active subsequently at the Ming and Qing courts, introducing modern European science and cartographical

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143. Geoff WADE, tr., *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: an open access resource*, Singapore, http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/, entries 166, 170 accessed December 27, 2013. Henceforth, WADE, *MSL*; Roderich PTAK; KAUZ 2001.

144. HALL 2014a, p. 213.

145. Geoff WADE, 'The Chinese "World View" and Rhetoric of the *Ming Shi-lu*', in WADE, *MSL*, p. 31. Accessed January 16 2014.

146. FALCHETTA 2006; ALMAGIA 1944-55.

Fig. 8– Fra Mauro's depiction of various ships sailing in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

traditions to the Chinese and taking back to the West, in return, accurate geographical and linguistic knowledge of China.

The Rupture

Soon after, the Atlantic world displaced the Mediterranean in the *MSL*, indicating the economic shift then taking place in Europe. Twenty records dating from 1517 to 1621 are devoted to the 'Fo-lang-ji', a Chinese corruption of the Indian term *firangi* for designating the Portuguese and in turn derived from the Arabic term al- faranji, used to label a foreigner or Frank. This usage provides us an evidence of the languages circulating between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean worlds and the linguistic terms then prevalent.

Thereafter, northwest Europe looms larger in Chinese annals. In the early seventeenth century we are told that the Dutch had arrived in the eastern seas; in December 1604 the Fujian provincial chief informed the War Ministry that 'the "red fan" have burst into the inner seas. We should make arrangements by which to expel them and clean up the coastal borders' and in January 1608 a memorial from Fujian noted that "the 'red yi' have come again, have slaughtered merchants and fisherman, and are looking to encroach upon the inner territory[147]". The old order had ended.

Mediterranean-Indian Ocean Contacts: Overview

Observations

This short survey of Mediterranean-Indian Ocean contacts from antiquity to the early modern generates the following observations:

First, as declared at the very outset, this study concentrated on contacts between the *eastern* Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, and not on contacts between the western Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which has so far been the norm, the term 'Indian Ocean' being usually employed almost exclusively for only the *western* Indian Ocean. This limited usage has had a long linguistic legacy. Salles notes that the old *Erythra Thalassa* of the classical world gradually gave

147. WADE, *MSL*, entries 3135, 3168, 3169, 3205, 3221, 3236 accessed December 27, 2013.

way to the name of the 'Indian Sea', a name that continued into the eighteenth century as a synonym for the Indian Ocean, but referring primarily to the *western* Indian Ocean, the *eastern* Indian Ocean being called until the eighteenth century the 'Eastern' or 'Oriental' Ocean [148]. The eastern Indian Ocean was neither as well known to the Hellenes and Romans, its mainland being known as the Ptolemaic '*India* Extra Gangem', nor does it seem to have possessed the same ancient integration as the western Indian Ocean [149].

Mediterranean unfamiliarity with the eastern Indian Ocean world is displayed by the fact that the *Catalan Atlas* of 1375 tore apart the medieval *mappamundi* format of Europe, as the actual, real and experienced knowledge of the eastern Indian Ocean region, and of China, from the travels of the Polos was incorporated into this atlas, thereby signifying the radical break with earlier cartographic traditions [150]. Edson notes that the *Catalan Atlas* catapults us into a new world, crisscrossed with trading ships and caravans originating in the Mediterranean. Mallorcan mapmakers, linked by profession to the society of sea going merchants – Arabs, Jews and Christians – faithfully recorded all new information [151]. Travellers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with their new data, presented a challenge to the traditional *mappamundi* format; more particularly the arrangement and depiction of space. The *mappamundi* had been a paradigm of the conception of the arrangement of the world in the European High Middle Ages, but the data brought back by the explorers, coupled with new ways of mapping as evident in the European sea charts, began to break it apart [152]. In fifteenth-century Europe this tension became particularly acute, visible in Fra Mauro's two world maps of 1450 and 1459 to which the new geographical knowledge generated from the travels of Nicolo da Conti contributed [153].

Second, Chinese conceptions of the Roman Empire seem equally vague. For example, where exactly was Da Qin? [154] Pulleyblank notes that the Chinese conception of Da Qin was confused from the outset with ancient mythological notions of the far west. For example, juggling was linked in the Chinese mind with Mediterranean lands from the outset; this stereotype was reinforced by the arrival in 121 CE of a group of magicians/jugglers at the Chinese court via Southeast

148. Salles 1998, p. 67; Mukherjee 2013b.

149. Salles 1998, p. 66-67.

150. Mukherjee 2013a, p 7; Picazo Muntaner 2013.

151. Edson 2007, p. 88.

152. Edson 2007, p. 113.

153. Edson 2007, p. 163.

154. Hopál 2011.

Asia who claimed to be from "the west of the sea"[155]. It is likely that the jugglers came from Armenia, and not from Shan Burma as is usually supposed, the latter supposition being a common error in view of the fact that the mission came up from the Gulf of Martaban. But the Shan states had not emerged at this period. However, 'Shan' was also a toponym for Armenia[156]. It was subject to the Roman Empire from the time of Pompeius' campaign for nearly four centuries and Trajan created the short-lived Province of Armenia between 114 and 117 CE.

Was Da Qin the Roman Empire in *toto*, or just the eastern Roman Empire, or just any country east of Rome and west of China? In the Chinese annals, the geographical notions of Ta-ts'in/Da Qin, Fu-lin, Haixi often seem interchangeable. Added to these may be the name of Li-jian or Li-kan, usually identified with Syria. The first mention of Li-kan is in 91 BCE: "After the Han (Chinese) embassy had returned (from Parthia) they (the Parthians) sent forth an embassy to follow the Han embassy to come and see the extent and greatness of the Han Empire. They offered to the Han court large birds' eggs, and jugglers from Li-kan (Syria)[157]". The later *Hou Hanshu* noted that "the country of Ta-ts'in is also called Li-kan and, as being situated on the western part of the sea, Hai-hsi-kuo (*i.e.*, "country of the western part of the sea"). Its territory amounts to several thousand *li*; it contains over four hundred cities, and of dependent states there are several times ten. The defenses of cities are made of stone[158]".

While Li-kan is usually identified with Ta-ts'in/Da Qin, the eastern Roman Empire centred on Syria with its capital at Antioch, Pulleyblank suggests that it may have been Hyrcania, a country that existed on the southwest of the Caspian Sea

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155. Pulleyblank 1999, p. 75, 78. Schoff 1917 opines that this refers to Indian jugglers, 'Ta-ts'in' or 'Da Qin' as being any country west of China, p. 242-243.

156. "During the 9th year [of Yung-yuan, 97 C.E.] the barbarian tribes outside the frontier and the king of the country of Shan [Armenia], named Yung-yu-tiao, sent twofold interpreters, and was endowed with state jewels. Ho-ti [Emperor, 89–106 C.E.] conferred a golden seal with a purple ribbon, and the small chiefs were granted seals, ribbons, and money. During the 1st year of Yung-ning [120 C.E.] the king of the country of Shan, named Yung-yu-tiao, again sent an embassy who, being received to His Majesty's presence, offered musicians and jugglers', *Hou-Han-Shu*, chs. 86, 88 (written 5th Century C.E.), for 25–220 C.E. See also the From the *Hsin-t'ang-shu*, ch. 221 (written mid-11th Century C.E.), for 1060 C.E.: 'Fu-lin [Byzantium] is the ancient Ta-ts'in [Roman Syria]. It lies above the western sea [Indian Ocean]. Some call it Hai-hsi-kuo [*i.e.*, "country on the west of the sea"]. It is 40,000 *li* distant from our capital and lies in the west of Shan [Armenia]". From East Asian History Sourcebook: *Chinese Accounts of Rome, Byzantium and the Middle East*, c. 91 B.C.E.–1643 C.E.

157. *Shih-Chi*, ch. 123, 91 BCE. http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/eastasia/eastasiasbook.asp East Asian History Sourcebook: *Chinese Accounts of Rome, Byzantium and the Middle East*, c. 91 B.C.E.–1643 C.E.

158. *Hou-Han-Shu*, chs. 86, 88.

in the second century BCE and later made synonymous with Da Qin, i.e. countries lying to the west of China [159]. This observation echoes Schoff's notion of 'Ta-ts'in' being a flexible geographical term referring to any place west of China, a point also reinforced by Hirth and Rockhill [160]. It is significant that Baghdad is called both Ta-ts'in and Pai-ta in the *Chu-fan-chi* of Zhao Rugua of the late thirteenth century, i.e., it was identified both as the old Roman Orient and by its new name [161]. Li-kan, as Syria, is also mentioned in the *Chu-fan-chi*, but Fu-lin or Byzantium too is identified with Syria, thus creating further confusion. Moreover, by that time the Roman Orient, or even the Roman Empire, was no more, the retention of old names suggesting that the Chinese had not updated prior knowledge, or that, as suggested earlier, Chinese knowledge of the medieval West was mediated by the Ilkhans. Zhao Rugua also mentioned two seas: calling them the 'Eastern' (Persian Gulf) [162] and 'Western' (Mediterranean) Seas of the Arabs, beyond which lay 'Murabit' or Almoravid Spain and North Africa, and even beyond them lay hazy kingdoms where the sun set and of which the Chinese had no knowledge [163]. These were geographical details obviously derived second-hand.

Third, we have used here the two geographical notions of "Indomediterranea" and "Eurasia". "Indomediterranea" became a reality from Roman times but the notion of "Eurasia" has an older lineage. "Eurasia" was not a creation of the thirteenth century, although it is undeniable that the Mongol pacification of the thirteenth century linked Europe and Asia and furthered the concept of "Eurasia". Nevertheless, we must keep in mind the fact that Eurasia had been a reality from Achaemenid and Parthian times, routes running through it providing the initial connectivities between East and West. Once Parthia collapsed in the third century CE, a reconceptualization of the Chinese worldview between the third to seven centuries was necessary, requiring China to re-think foreign lands and boundaries.

Finally, we saw that the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea provided the crucial link between the Mediterranean worlds and the Indian Ocean lands throughout history, and particularly as regards the maritime routes, whenever direct contacts waned. The roles of these smaller seas should not be underestimated, Salles writing that "Any map of the Near East shows that the Arabian peninsula and its bordering seas or "channels", the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, appear as natural "bridges" between the western part of the Indian Ocean… and the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, from Antioch to Alexandria. Two routes were in use in antiquity as they are today: the direct maritime connection through the Arabian

159. Pulleyblank 1999, see p. 73.

160. Schoff 1917, p. 243; Hirth *et al.* 1965, p. 5-6.

161. Hirth *et al.* 1965, p. VII-VIII.

162. Park 2011, p. 31.

163. Hirth *et al.* 1965, p. 26-27.

Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, and the long route through the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates river, with a short segment from the Syrian desert straight to Antioch [164]". The roles of these seas diminished once the Portuguese started using the Cape Route from the sixteenth century.

Twinned Worlds

We noted that Latin sources of the second century CE had called the Gulf area *fines Indiae*, while Syriac sources of the same period referred to the Gulf as an Indian Sea [165]. The western Indian Ocean was a well-integrated region, displaying 'an ancient and progressive integration into an eastern mare nostrum' that owed little to the Mediterranean model or to Greek and Roman actions [166]. Despite this fact, Hellenistic and Roman worlds displayed an exceptional familiarity with the lands of the Indian Ocean, displaying what Salles has called a "routine reality"[167]. Significantly, Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Byzantine from Alexandria, found almost a twin Christian world in the lands of the western and central Indian Ocean, suggesting he was equally at ease in both Orthodox and Nestorian traditions [168].

But this was not the case in the eastern Indian Ocean. Ours has been a story of random connections and periodic (dis) connections, and not one of structured connectivities as are discerned in the western Indian Ocean. Twin worlds emerged only at certain times and were generated by specific networks, usually commercial and religious, making the eastern Indian Ocean accessible and more familiar to the Mediterranean world at certain identifiable moments. Folda and Prazniak suggest two significant moments in the thirteenth century when the two worlds met : once in 1260 and once again at an unspecified moment in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. In the first instance, in 1260, at either Acre or Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, artists created a striking example of these contemporary interactions and the eclectic artistic environment they produced : three figures commemorating the short-lived victory of Mongols and Christians over Islamic Mamluk forces at Damascus in 1260 – a powerful event that embodied contemporary hopes for a continued alliance between Christian and Mongol forces against the Mamluks. With the consolidation of the Mongol Ilkhanate in western Asia and Khubilai Khan's Yuan dynasty rule in East Asia, 1260 became a takeoff point for accelerated political and cultural interactions among eastern Mediterranean centers and the

164. Salles 1998, p. 46.

165. Salles 1998, p. 67.

166. Salles 1998, p. 66-67. This is corroborated by data from Spaulding 2011 and Beaujard 2012.

167. Salles 1998, p. 66.

168. Faller 2011, p. 221.

Ilkhanate[169]. The second example concerns a revival of neo-Manichaeasm in Europe, Persia and China during the eleventh-twelfth centuries: the Cathars or heretics in the Roman Church, proto-Sufism in Persia and the Manichaean leader Fang La's rebellion in 1120–1121, which helped bring down the Northern Song dynasty, are instances[170]. In the fourteenth century Ibn Battuta, travelling in the Bay of Bengal, met Muslim officials while in China, leading him to write "during my stay in China I always felt in meeting Musulmans just as if I had fallen in with my own kith and kin[171]". This was truly a twin world: the southern Mediterranean and China meeting in a Pax Islamica!

Travellers among Christian communities through Tabriz, Armenia, and Rome transmitted images of Ilkhan Hülegü and Doquz Khatun re-imagined as the new Constantine and Helen, parents of the founder of the Byzantine Empire Constantine the Great. One such illustration found its way to the Papal offices in Rome[172]. Just as Constantine was later imagined in Inner Asia, so too was the Alexander myth as world conqueror echoed in Egypt, Syria and Persia, the last portraying Alexander as Iskandar or Sikandar with the Persian poets Firdausi and Nizami creating respectively the *Shahnama* in the tenth-eleventh centuries and the *Sikandar Namah* in the twelfth century. At Tabriz in the 1330s the Great Mongol *Shahnama* acknowledged Alexander as world leader. South and Southeast Asian polities echoed the Alexandrine legacy from the thirteenth century. Notable examples include the Delhi Sultan Ala ud-din Khalji's (1296-1316) portrayal of himself as *sikandar al-thani* or the second Alexander, the *Sejarah Melayu's* genealogical account of the first sultan of Melaka as descended from Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain (composed in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries) and the portrayal of Iskandar Muda of Achin (r. 1607-1636) as the young Alexander.

Technological transfers between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean offer an insight into how this twinned world operated in the early modern period. Let me concentrate on changes in shipbuilding in the Malay world, although other examples also come readily to mind. The changes were radical and noticeable enough for Manguin to note that a naval revolution occurred in the Malay seas between the mid-sixteenth century and the 1630s, with progressively larger Malay and Achinese galleys appearing at sea. Other Southeast Asian powers, too, were not far behind, building increasingly superior war boats[173]. Polonia and Barros highlight the multi-faceted nature of transfers between the Mediterranean and

169. Folda 2007, p. 149; Prazniak 2010, p. 189-190.

170. Prazniak 2010, p. 197-199.

171. Yule 1866, vol. 2, p. 495.

172. Prazniak 2013, p. 180.

173. Manguin 2012, p. 167.

the Indian Ocean not only in shipbuilding but also in port construction and fort engineering at this time[174].

Evidence therefore reveals that the two worlds met on multiple occasions. But we do not know how long these encounters lasted, nor are we always conscious of their lingering effects. While 'twin worlds' were slow to appear, when they did materialize they were not one but various, many paired 'models' being visible: Scythians and Persians, Persians and Greeks, Khotanese and Persians, the Kushanas and Khotanese, Greeks and Sogdians, Confucians and Christians, Mongols and Catholics, Daoists and Muslims; the list is endless. The conclusion is that if there existed a 'twin' world at all, there were many archetypes contesting for ascendancy in the same space over a thousand years.

Mediterranean-Indian Ocean Mirrors

Mirrored Worlds?

We may now ask ourselves; in what sense did the two worlds 'mirror' each other? Taking the examples of China and Rome once again, we see that the two empires were strategically positioned at opposite ends of Eurasia and exchanging Chinese silk against Roman glassware, Pulleyblank suggesting that Da Qin or Great Qin was a kind of counter-China at the other end of the world in the Chinese mind[175].

While there is little evidence in China of the hybridity and cosmopolitanism that marked the Roman Empire and the Mediterranean region as well as the *western* Indian Ocean in general, Han values reigning supreme in China throughout; nevertheless certain parallels can be found both in terms of state formation and disintegration as well as in the nature of the state[176]. Both the Roman and Qin-Han empires were built on templates provided by antecedent states that expanded into a widening ecumene: in the West, from the river cultures of the Middle East into the Mediterranean and then on to continental Europe, in the East from the Wei and middle Yellow River valleys into the Central Plain and then on to the south[177]. In the case of both empires, large-scale conquest triggered violent adjustment processes: in the East, there was a shift from the 'war-machine' state of Qin to the less overtly centralized regime of the early Han, and in the West we can see a

174. Polonia 2013; Morais Barros 2013.

175. Pulleyblank 1999, see p. 71.

176. Scheidel 2007, p. 1-12, www.researchgate.net/…Roman…/3deec5157bca048a37.pdf – accessed 11 January 2014; Scheidel 2010.

177. Scheidel 2007, p. 3.

more protracted transition that replaced an established oligarchy with a military monarchy [178].

Both were world empires, so similar that they may be labelled 'twin' empires. Scheidel argues:

> Two thousand years ago, perhaps half of the entire human species had come under the control of just two powers, the Roman and Han empires at opposite ends of the Eurasia. Both entities were broadly similar in terms of size. Both of them were run by god-like emperors residing in the largest cities the world had seen so far; both states were made up of some 1,500 to 2,000 administrative districts and, at least at times, employed hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Both states laid claim to ruling the whole world, *orbis terrarum* and *tianxia*, while both encountered similar competition for surplus between central government and local elites, similar pressures generated by secondary state formation beyond their frontiers and subsequent 'barbarian' infiltration, and both of them even ended in similar ways: One half, the original political core – the west in Europe, the north in China –, was first weakened by warlordism and then taken over by 'barbarian' successor states, whereas the other half was maintained by a traditionalist regime. It was only from the late sixth century CE onward that the two trajectories of state formation began to diverge… [179]

In the Mediterranean, the Roman Empire eventually broke into two halves. While its western half was taken over by 'barbarian' successor states from about 400 CE onwards, a quintessentially Roman state survived in the East for another millennium although in a much diminished form from the 630s CE onwards. In China, a similar division occurred soon after the end of the Han dynasty, following the short interlude of the Three Kingdoms from 220 to 265 CE and temporary reunification under the Western Jin from 280 to 304 CE, from 317 CE onwards. In the south, a traditionalist system continued under the last five of the Six Dynasties (317-589 CE) while northern China was fragmented among 'barbarian' successor states (the so-called Sixteen Kingdoms). However, while the former Han Empire was eventually reconstituted in the Sui/Tang period (589-907 CE), the Roman Empire was never restored, although the concept of 'Empire' continued into the European Middle Ages [180].

In our vision of mirrored worlds of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean we may say that while the Mediterranean and Chinese empires developed independently, they also followed similar trajectories. According to Scheidel, both Rome and China shared a large number of structural similarities that were

178. Scheidel 2007, p.4.

179. Scheidel 2007, p.2. For the trajectory of divergence and their traits, see Scheidel 2007, p.8-10.

180. http://www.stanford.edu/~scheidel/acme.htm accessed 11 January 2014.

moderated by cultural specifics. The similarities include a shift from city-states to territorial states and from military mass mobilization for inter-state warfare to professional armies for border control; the growth of a proto-bureaucratic civil service accompanied by functional differentiation of power; formal dichotomies in provincial organization undermined by intensified central control; the settlement and military use of foreign settlers in frontier zones; massive expansion of the money supply through standardized state-controlled minting; monetization of taxation; increasing state control of manufacturing and trade; great increases in iron production; census registration and formal status ranking of the general population; codification of law; the growth of markets in land and the gradual concentration of wealth among elites; the transformation of smallholders into tenants, coupled with the growing strength of private patronage ties superseding state authority; unsuccessful attempts at land reform; eventual rural unrest; ideological unification through monumental construction, religious rituals, and elite education; the creation of a homogeneous elite culture and corpora of classics; the emergence of court-centered historiography; ideologies of normative empire sustained by transcendent powers; religious change in late periods, leading to the formation of autonomous church systems; and a philosophical and religious shift in emphasis from community values to ethical conduct and individual salvation. At the same time, cultural specifics mediated the formal expression of many of these developments: significant differences range from the Republican background of Greco-Roman civilization as opposed to the feudal-monarchical tradition in China to the relationship between political and ideological power and the degree of autonomy of military power[181].

Not such Parallel Lines

Against this vision of largely complementary developments we must note that the monetary systems in the two worlds remained different, Scheidel noting that while silver and later gold dominated the monetary economy of the Roman Empire, the victorious Chinese regimes operated a system of bronze coinages supplemented by uncoined precious-metal bullion. The Roman Empire was significantly more monetized than the Han state and more coin was available for commercial exchange or hoarding. In view of the dramatic surge of Mediterranean trade and production for a mass market in the Roman period and the growing wealth of the Roman elite that does not seem to have been matched by that of its Han peers, both commerce and elite hoarding may well have been sufficiently

181. http://www.stanford.edu/~scheidel/acme.htm accessed 11 January 2014; for routes from China see Mukherjee 2016; for border and route control in China, see Rila Mukherjee, 'Routes into the Present', in Radhika Seshan (ed.), *Narratives, Routes and Intersections in Pre-Modern Asia*, Routledge India (2017).

important to absorb the larger stock of coinage in the Roman empire [182]. This fact may explain the metal hunger of China and its need to access the western Indian Ocean-Mediterranean trade.

This need was satisfied for a short while in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. Kuroda shows that the emergence of the Mongol Empire in China should be seen as a financial, commercial and military axis that linked East with West in the thirteenth century and generated much silver and trade, noting that Aden, guarding the southern entrance to the Red Sea, certainly transmitted silver from the East, believed to be from China, to the north during this period. The export of 'Arabian' horses to the East brought goods, including silver, in the opposite direction. Throughout the period, there are eyewitness accounts of Chinese ships reaching Aden, and the Rasulid ruler of Yemen sent an embassy with gifts to China in 1271. Crucially, though, silver coinage in Aden became lighter in 1359, the very year that silver became so scarce in Egypt. All the information concerning money during this period suggests that a massive influx of uncoined silver after the 1270s bridged the gap between West and East, and that this influx suddenly ceased in the 1360s [183]. Were the Ming 'tribute' voyages in the fifteenth century Indian Ocean the outcome of the decline in silver circulation in the fourteenth century and the need to access alternate sources of bullion?

Spatio-temporal inconsistencies in the history of contacts between the two worlds reveal a different picture from complementarity. Contacts between China and Rome were tentative in antiquity and exploratory in nature but became somewhat more regular in the late classical period, the objective being, from the Chinese side, to open trade with the Roman Empire. The early Romans had the same intention, as seen in Marcus Aurelius' mission to China of 166 CE. The Chinese fascination with the Roman Empire: its structure, its nature and its extensive commerce and intense militarization, has already been noted. In the medieval era, despite the disintegration of Rome, connectivities did continue to exist, but contacts took place increasingly by the land routes due to the Mongol 'pacification'. It made known Chinese science and China's technological marvels to the West: paper, print technology and gunpowder are examples that come easily to mind. In the early modern period, from the time of the Ming onward, we observe a scaling down of contacts with the Mediterranean world, the Mings concentrating more on Indian Ocean lands. Whatever contacts occurred took place by sea; the overland route was hardly used. Finally, European sea-borne contacts with the late Ming and Qing mirror the shift occurring in Europe in the late sixteenth-early seventeenth centuries: the decline of the Mediterranean world and the rise of the Atlantic economies. The Portuguese and then the Dutch would henceforth dominate the space occupied by the 'Eastern' Romans.

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182. Scheidel 2008, p.2, 55. http://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/scheidel/020803.pdf, accessed January 23 2014.

183. Kuroda 2009, p.256.

Second, we notice a difference in the imageries of India and China being constructed in the Mediterranean world. The 'India' of the Hellenic geographers generated a continuous literary tradition, one with its own logic, recurrent themes, stereotypes and imageries, reflecting the anxieties of the classical world toward the unknown, even for those with a first hand knowledge of the region. In the process, an archaeology of knowledge and a library of wisdom was constructed, one which proliferated and perpetuated itself while retaining a terrible power of fascination toward India [184]. A similar scholarly enterprise is not visible in the case of China, nor is it observable in the case of the other countries of the eastern Indian Ocean such as those of what we now call 'Southeast Asia', the latter remaining almost purely an Arab-Persian enterprise, both in imagination and in actual knowledge [185]. It is noteworthy that these places figure only from the early medieval in the western imagination. In Arabo-Persian accounts Southeast Asian ports and kingdoms were seen as mere stopovers or transfer-points in the sea voyage from India to China and not as parts of actual polities. This marginality is now being rectified, Hall noting that Abu-Lughod's depiction of eight major trade 'circuits' (*Fig. 1*) stretching from Northwestern Europe to China and incorporating Chaudhuri's Indian Ocean map, while an improvement by its inclusion of Southeast Asia, also marginalized the region, being portrayed as dominated by overlapping Chinese and Indian interests [186].

China does enter the realm of European imagination, but much later, in the medieval period. It is to be noted that the European accounts of China are quite restrained, not fantastical as had been the case with India. Marco Polo's account of Yuan China remains well known, the account also influencing Fra Mauro's *World*

184. Jacob 1995, p. 80.

185. See the voyages and adventures of Sinbad the sailor. Hall, 'West Coast 9th-Century India Maritime Diaspora', p. 21, writes "The tales of Sinbad the Sailor, a fictional sailor and the hero of a story-cycle of Middle Eastern origin, living in Basrah during the 'Abbasid Caliphate, incorporate the reality of increased Middle East contact with the Indian Ocean during the ninth century, consequent to the expansion of "Maritime Silk Road" to China after the establishment of the 'Abbasid Caliphate capital at Baghdad in 762. In his voyages throughout the seas east of Africa and south of Asia, he has fantastic adventures going to magical places, meeting monsters, and encountering supernatural phenomena. The fictional Sinbad tales were based on popular word-of-mouth and the written portrayals of the Indian Ocean realm in a series of Arabic-language geographical texts that provided "first hand" accounts of their author's Indian Ocean travels, but which were often collections of "fact" supplied by others who had made Indian Ocean voyages.' For accounts of voyages that did take place see Eusebius Renaudot, *Ancient Accounts of India and China By Two Mohammedan Travellers who went to Those Parts in the Ninth Century*, London (1733), rpt New Delhi (1995); *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind*, J. Sauvaget (1948); Ahmad 1989.

186. For a recent overview, see Hall 2013, p. 73-74.

Map. The account of the fictional Sir John de Mandeville c. 1357 described the opulence at the court of the Great Khan thus :

> above the emperor's table and the other tables, and above a great part in the hall, is a vine made of fine gold. And it spreadeth all about the hall. And it hath many clusters of grapes, some white, some green, some yellow and some red and some black, all of precious stones. The white be of crystal and of beryl and of iris ; the yellow be of topazes ; the red be of rubies and of grenaz and of alabrandines ; the green be of emeralds, of perydoz and of chrysolites ; and the black be of onyx and garantez. And they be all so properly made that it seemeth a very vine bearing kindly grapes [187].

Much of the geographical information from the accounts of Marco Polo and Mandeville were incorporated into parts 3 and 4 of the *Catalan Atlas*. The parts have been described :

> Ils offrent de nombreuses allusions aux religions comme aux récits de voyages disponibles, notamment le *Livre des merveilles* de Marco Polo ou le *Voyage* de Jean de Mandeville et constituent une représentation intermédiaire entre les mappemondes médiévales et les portulans. La carte débute, à l'Extrême-Orient par le royaume de Gog et Magog et la représentation du Christ, puis décrit « Catayo » (la Chine) avec « Chambaleth », la cité du Grand Khan, l'Insulinde formée d'une multitude d'îles multicolores, qui évoque l'océan circulaire des Orbis Terrarum avec l'« Illa Trapobana » (Sumatra) et le mythique royaume des Amazones (« Regio Femarum » [sic]), etc. La représentation se fait allusive, il n'y a pas de rupture entre le merveilleux et le cartographique [188].

Matteo Ricci is emblematic of the final link between the eastern Indian Ocean and Mediterranean lands. Ricci's Renaissance education and culture showed in the universality of his knowledge and in the magnificence of his manifold contribution to the understanding of the West in China and vice versa through a series of maps of China made between 1588 and 1601. His masterly achievements in the field of geography, scientifically depicting, according to the standards of his age, the world and the Chinese Empire itself, advanced traditional Chinese cartography to the levels of Western cartographic science, exceeding not only the great Chinese cartographical accomplishments but also the knowledge of Europeans of the Far East and China in particular. This Ricci achieved mostly by his *mappamondo Cinese*, and by teaching the Chinese world-geography and making contemporary astronomico-geographical equations familiar, he enlarged China's horizons by truly placing her on the globe of current knowledge. Ricci also re-oriented European geography, different from traditional cartographical presentations, which

187. John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext97/tosjm10h.htm. Accessed 27 January 2014.

188. http://expositions.bnf.fr/ciel/catalan/index.htm. Accessed 20 January 2014.

still bore the Ptolemeian and Marco Polo features of 'Seres', 'Cathay' and 'Manzi' and augmented his maps with the new, experiental, knowledge[189]. Du Halde's *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise, enrichie des cartes générales et particulieres de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulieres du Thibet, & de la Corée*, published from Paris in 1735, furthered Ricci's work and made the country further known to the West. The East and the West became truly linked through the permanent cartographic revolution unleashed by Matteo Ricci.

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189. SZCZENIAK 1954, p. 135.

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